THE NEW REPUBLIC

MARCH 13, 2000

THE DIALLO VERDICT:

Why Africans Don't Blame America HANNA ROSIN

Blame Giuliani THE EDITORS

Do they want to lose?

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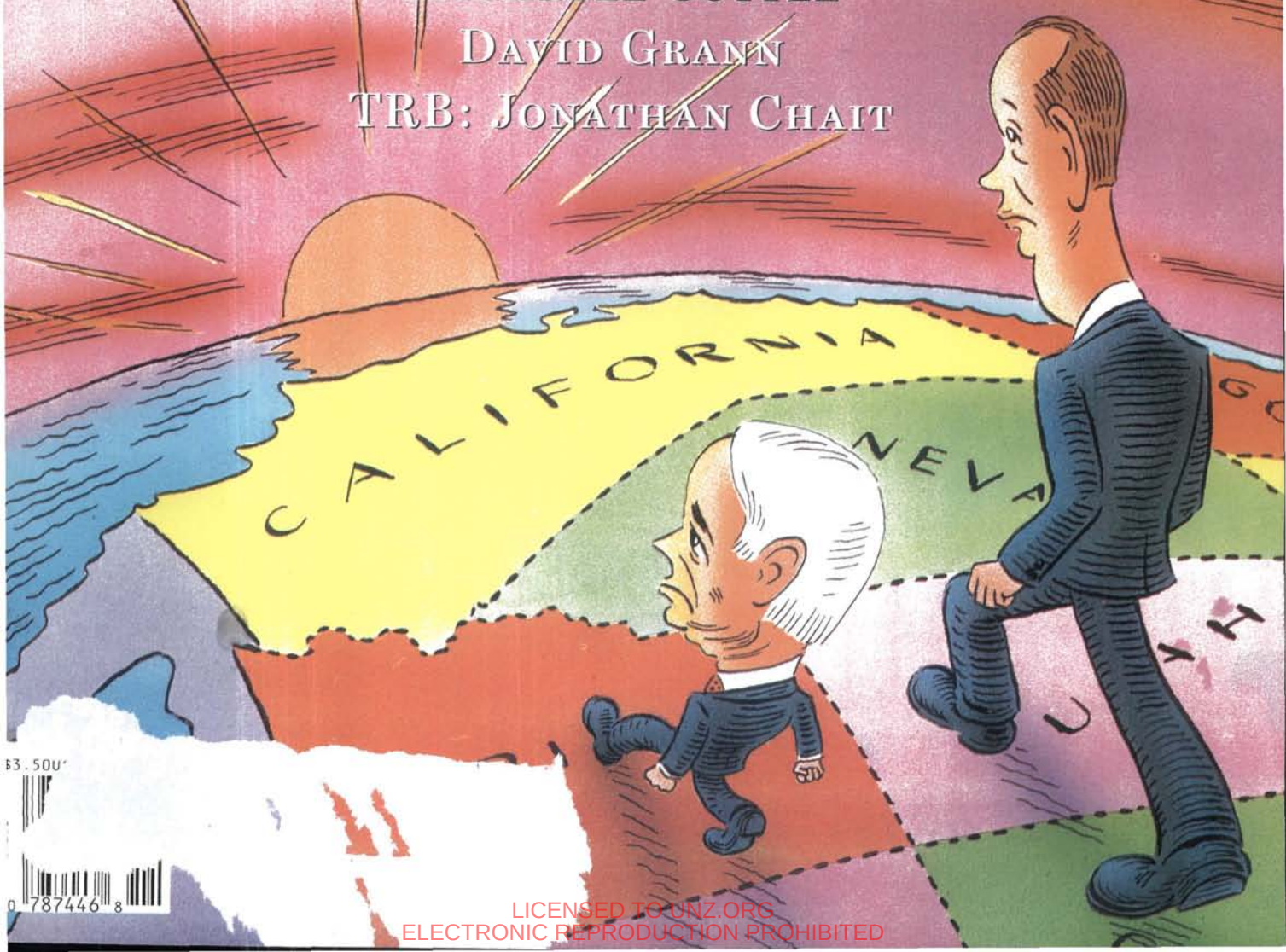

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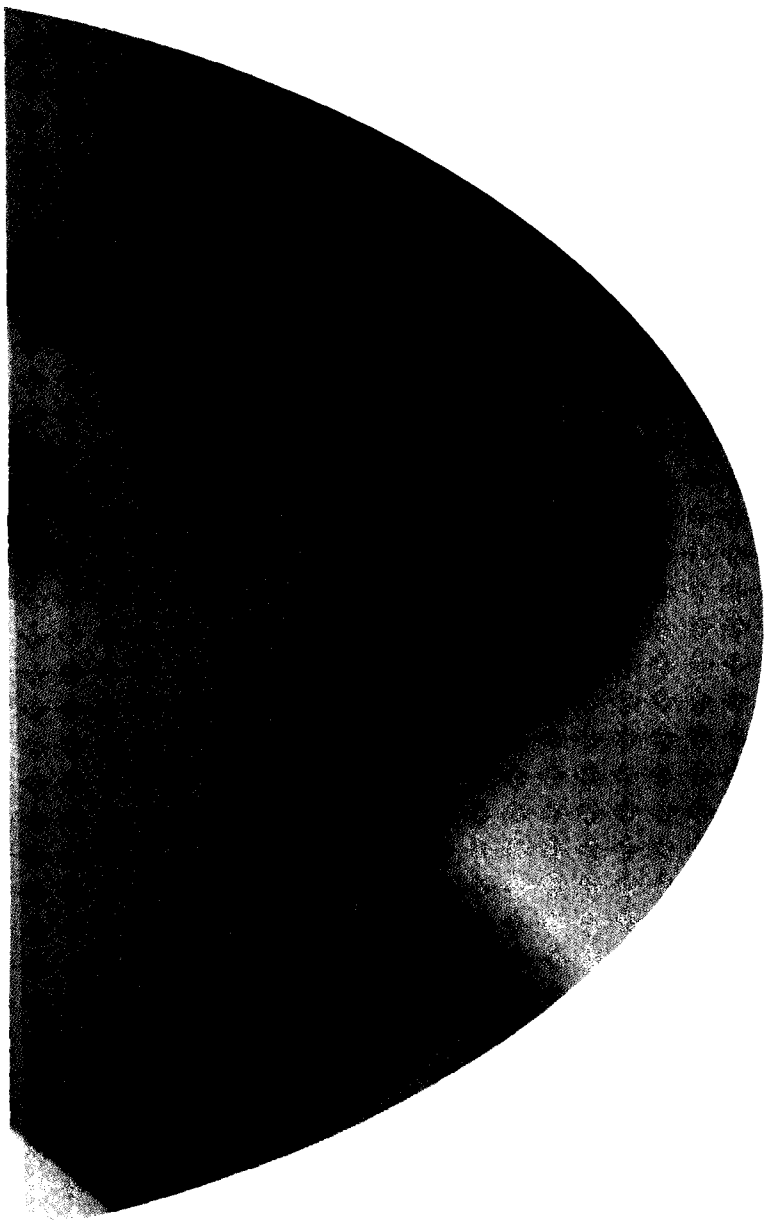

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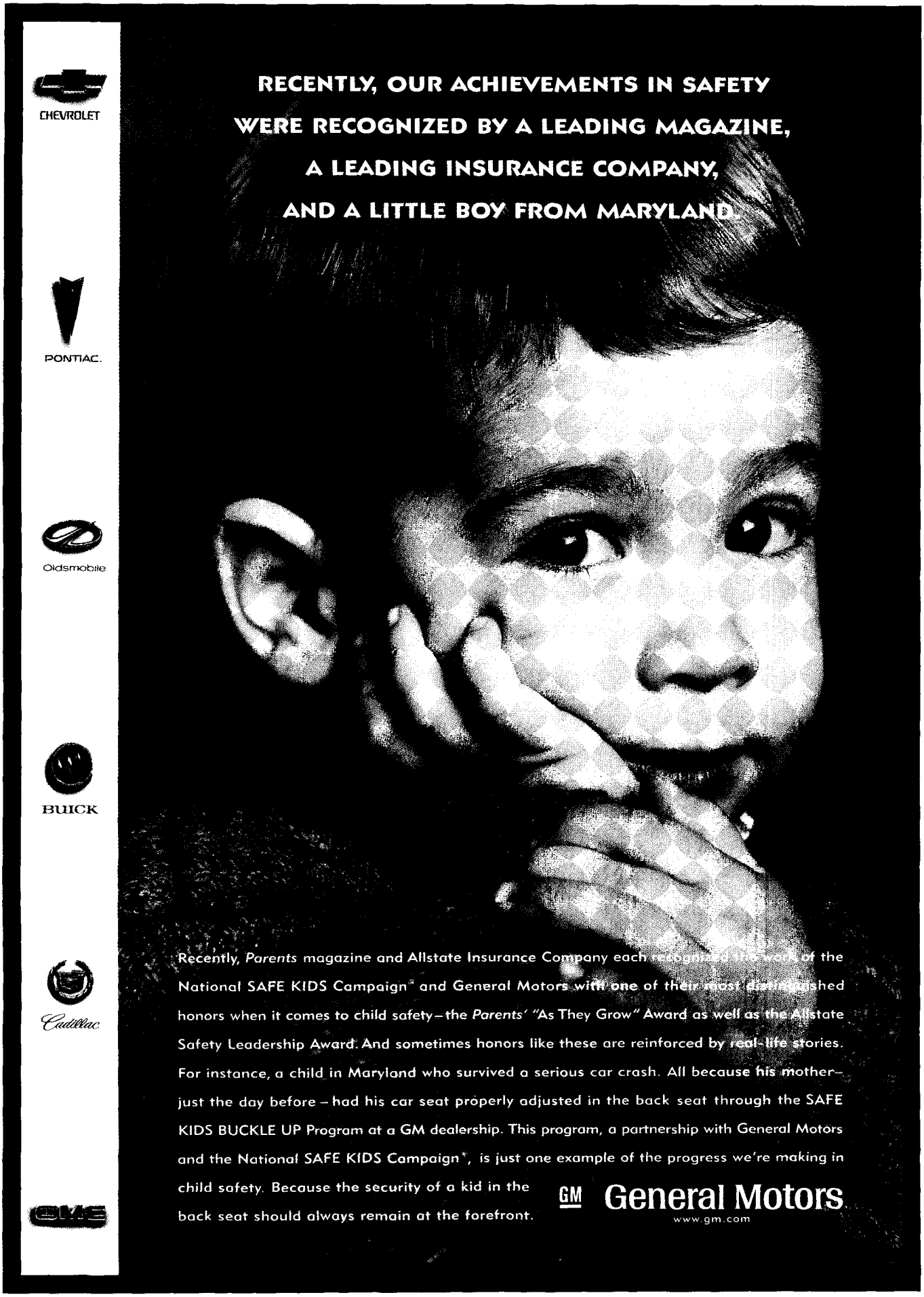
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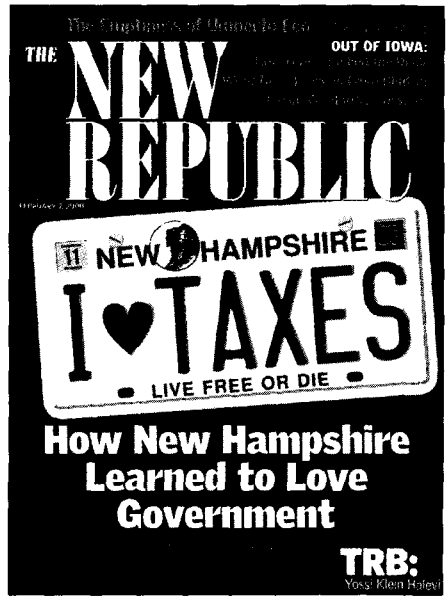
CORRESPONDENCE

Money for nothing

TO THE EDITORS:
Reading Jonathan Cohn's article ("How New Hampshire Learned to Love Government," February 7) reminded me of a statement made by an elderly gentleman in 1940 in Keene, New Hampshire, where a few of us lads from Mount Hermon School went on one of our rare off-campus days. The man showed us an elementary school that local folk had largely built themselves and declared, "We don't git nuthin', but we don't pay nuthin.'" As Cohn indicates, that formula won't fly anymore.

BERNARD STERNSHER
Professor of History Emeritus
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, Ohio



TO THE EDITORS:
In "How New Hampshire Learned to Love Government," Jonathan Cohn lists a number of alleged "deficiencies" of New Hampshire public schools and claims, "The common feature of all these problems is lack of spending by the state." To defend this thesis, Cohn attempts to explain away the fact that New Hampshire's students "are among the highest-average scorers on the SAT." Cohn writes that the high SAT scores are "misleading, as a widely cited report from the New Hampshire Center for Public Policy Studies recently showed. Leave out the kids from prep schools like Phillips Exeter Academy, control for the state's higher-than-average per capita income, and New Hampshire's public schools are average, if that."

But leaving out kids from prep schools is clearly a bogus "correction" to SAT scores. As the report states, fully 25 percent of the New Hampshire students who take SATs attend private schools, a number much higher than the national average of 15 percent. Leaving them out removes many of New Hampshire's brightest students from the pool of test-takers, biasing the resulting average downward. And, regarding Cohn's point about controlling for income differences among states, the report makes clear that such controls are of questionable validity and are, at best, a surrogate for controls on hard-to-analyze factors like parental concern for educational quality.

Even if the flawed corrections Cohn cites were valid, his asserted link between New Hampshire's low spending and deficient schools evaporates by the logic of his own arguments. He rightly observes that "by 1996, only seven percent of the money spent on New Hampshire public education came from state government. That was, by far, the smallest percentage of all the states—the Illinois state government, whose contribution ranked forty-ninth, was spending nearly *four times* as much." So Cohn ends up saying that, although New Hampshire takes last place in state support for public education, and despite the fact that Illinois, which comes in next to last, spends four times as much, New Hampshire's schools are still average.

STEPHEN WINEBERG
Exeter, New Hampshire

Missile offense

TO THE EDITORS:
Your February 7 editorial on missile defense ("Sky's the Limit") came to the right conclusion. If scientists devise a viable anti-missile system, the United States must build it even if the Russians object. Not to do so would leave the nation vulnerable to all sorts of nuclear dangers that deterrence can't counter, such as accidental, unauthorized, or irrational launches. However, your assessment of the technological state-of-play in missile defense is too pessimistic.

First, you say the theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) program is "a total bust—zero for five in recent tests." Wrong. The last two tests were so successful that the Pentagon has accelerated the program.

Similarly, you say the Airborne Laser's beam "possesses only a fraction of the power necessary to fire across the strategic distances required to knock down intercontinental ballistic missiles." The Airborne Laser wasn't designed to intercept ICBMs, but it could still do so if deployed in the launch area. Obviously, the reason you put a laser on a plane is precisely so that it will not need to shoot across intercontinental distances but instead can get close to its target for a reliable kill. Besides, software to compensate better for atmospheric distortion can extend the laser's lethal range without increasing its power.

The reason the Clinton administration is having a tough time getting ready for a deployment decision this summer is that the president gutted the national missile defense budget when he entered office. Now the administration has to play catch-up in order to cope with emerging threats in North Korea and elsewhere. The technological solutions are not as challenging as you suggest, and they would probably already be in hand if the program had stayed on track.

LOREN B. THOMPSON
Chief Operating Officer
Lexington Institute
Arlington, Virginia

THE EDITORS REPLY:
Like many contentions in the missile defense debate, Loren B. Thompson's points are true but tell less than meets the eye. Overall, the THAAD missile has failed six times in tests and hit its target twice, making it two for eight, a batting average of .250. Both hits happened in staged circumstances bearing only a partial resemblance to what the missile would encounter in an actual attack, so how successful they really were is a matter of semantics.

As for the Air Force's Airborne Laser, Thompson says it could intercept a strategic missile "if deployed in the launch area." Note that disclaimer. To be "in the launch area," the Airborne Laser, which is a modified 747 aircraft, would have to be cruising at 30,000 feet above North Korea or Iraq when a missile firing occurred. That's possible, but only if the United States had advance warning of the timing of a coming launch and only if the Airborne Laser were accompanied into enemy air defense range by tankers, jammer planes, and escort fighters, while U.S. bombers attacked the country's air defense network to prevent it from shooting the Airborne Laser down with a regular surface-to-air missile.

Someday there will be a practical anti-missile system, and then the United States should build it—and perhaps even share the technology with our adversaries, as Ronald Reagan once suggested. For the year 2000, though, wishing will not make it so. ■

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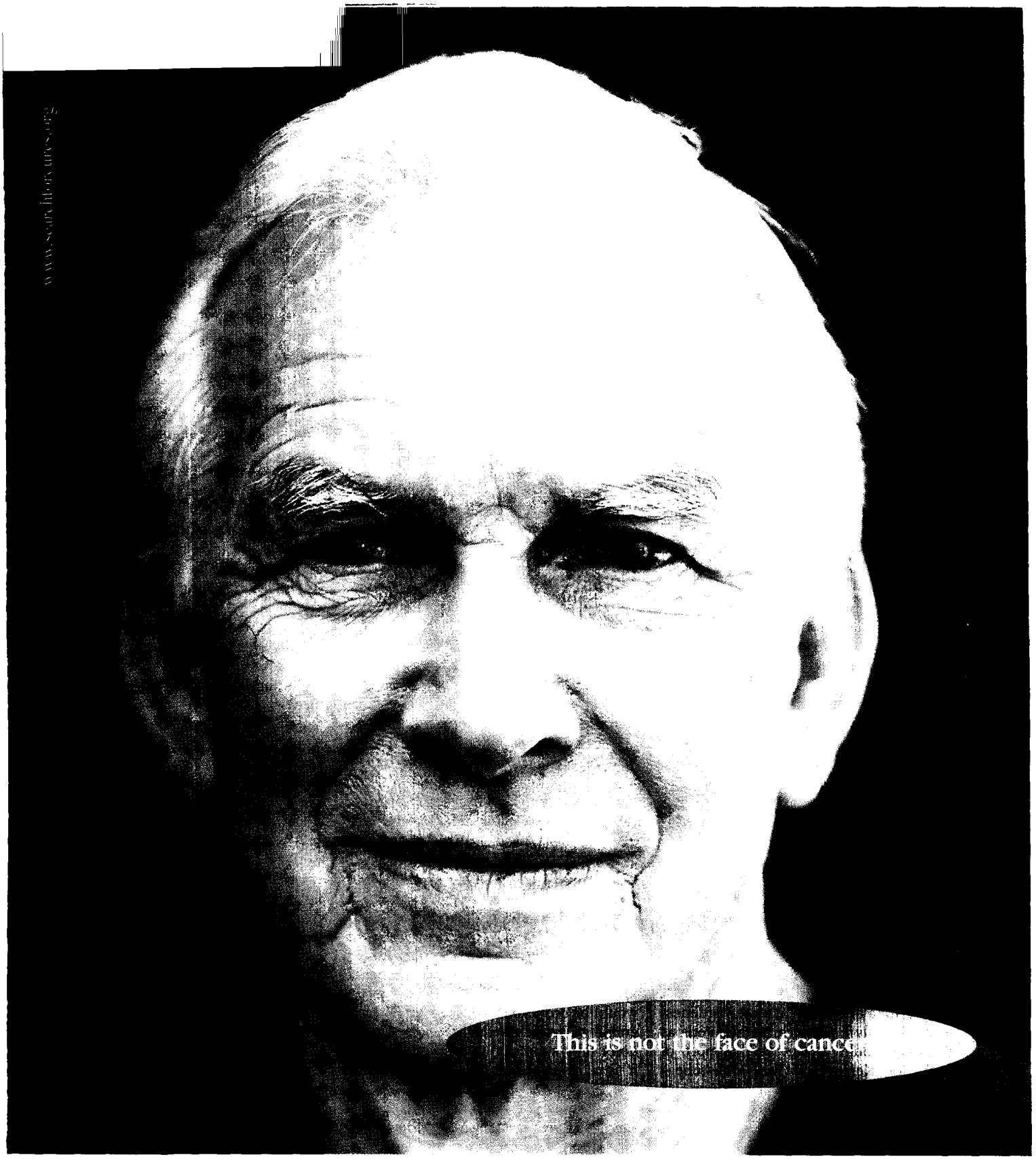

It's the face of William Bantz. Farmer, father and an obsessive do-it-yourselfer. At 73, he has lived with prostate cancer for six years. And he relies on help from advanced medicines developed by America's pharmaceutical companies to keep him free of symptoms. More people are surviving prostate cancer than ever before. But pharmaceutical company researchers won't give up until there is a cure. So people like William Bantz can keep on planning, dreaming and building for the future.

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

One for All

FOR TWO MONTHS now we've been reading about the tactical missteps that sank Bill Bradley's presidential campaign. He spent too much time in Iowa, where he couldn't win. He didn't respond to Al Gore's criticisms, thereby making himself look weak. He responded to Gore's criticisms, thereby losing the moral high ground. He spent too much time in Washington state, where (once again) he couldn't win.

This is nonfalsifiable gasbaggery. If responding and not responding both doomed Bradley, perhaps his decision to respond or not wasn't the real problem. And, sure, he spent a lot of time and money in Washington, where he didn't have much chance of winning. But the same could be said of California or New York. He has to spend his time *somewhere.*

No, Bradley's woes have little to do with tactics. The problem is deeper: a total lack of ideological coherence. Bradley likes to say, "I know what I believe." Maybe so, but he hasn't let the rest of us in on it.

Granted, the incoherence, which often manifests itself as vagueness, serves a purpose. Bradley's campaign has been, since its inception, a vehicle for Democrats who harbor grudges against Clinton, be they ideological or character-related. Bradley is a blank slate upon which his supporters can imprint the anti-Clinton fantasy of their choosing.

And, for a little while at least, vagueness worked. Only a platform as nebulous as Bradley's could attract the support of both Bob Kerrey and Paul Wellstone—respectively, the most conservative and most liberal Democrats in the Senate. Last year Kerrey supported the huge Republican tax cut and advocates privatizing Social Security. He expresses bitter disappointment that Clinton did not further restrain entitlement costs. Kerrey famously called Clinton "an unusually good liar," and, accordingly, his praise for Bradley is laced with references to the former New Jersey senator's honesty.

But, when it comes to actual issues, Kerrey doesn't seem to know much about the man he supports. Last month a talk-show caller asked the Nebraska senator whether Bradley's position on Social Security was closer to Clinton's or to his own. "Well, you—I—honestly, I don't know the answer to that," Kerrey stammered. But not knowing the specifics is useful, since it lets Kerrey see Bradley as a reflection of himself. When CNN's Wolf Blitzer asked him, "On the issues, what's the biggest single difference between Bill Bradley and Al Gore?" Kerrey replied: "I think the biggest difference is not an issue; the biggest difference is the capacity to come to the country and get the country to do not the easy stuff but the hard stuff." By "hard stuff," Kerrey presumably imagines a further rollback of the federal leviathan, not a vast expansion of it. No doubt Bradley's many Wall Street financiers share some version of this interpretation, too.

And Bradley lets them. He frequently says that "government should do a few big things well." This line can be understood to mean smaller but still effective government—an echo of George W. Bush's call for limited government, "focused, festive, and energetic ... doing a few things and doing them well."

But the more popular reading of Bradley's "big things" is Wellstone's—the abandonment of the cautious, small-beer centrism of the Clinton years in favor of a Great Society-style liberalism. Last week's TNR editorial endorsing Gore in the Democratic primary adopted this interpretation, accusing Bradley of "reflexive paleo-liberalism." In the same issue, operating under the same factual assumption (if not the same terminology), Robert B. Reich—the former secretary of labor and disenchanted liberal—supported Bradley.

Reich, of course, is not some frothing malcontent. His break with Clinton stems from a principled philosophical disagreement. Reich argues that the fiscal conservatism Clinton and Gore advocate goes far beyond what is necessary to maintain economic growth and that further spending on infrastructure and social programs would be economically and morally preferable to reducing the national debt. I don't fully subscribe to Reich's view, but it is a respected notion among serious liberals.

But there's not much reason to assume Bradley shares it. Here he is announcing his retirement from the Senate in 1995: "The Republicans are infatuated with the 'magic' of the private sector and reflexively criticize government as the enemy of freedom," lectured Bradley, "and the Democrats distrust the market, preach government as the answer to our problems, and prefer the bureaucrat they know to the consumer they can't control." A bizarrely evenhanded analysis for a moment when Newtoid revolutionaries were running wild through the halls of the Capitol and the Democrats were cowering on the precipice of Dick Morris-inspired ideological capitulation. The technical term to describe Bradley's kind of moral equivalency would be triangulation.

Has Bradley moved to the left since then? Not really. "The pro-growth policies of the 1990s must remain in place," he asserted in a recent speech. "Above all, this means the combination of sound fiscal and monetary discipline." If Bradley keeps Clinton's fiscal policies in place, he can't dish out more money than Gore. The vice president, complains Wellstone, "has no budget whatsoever for universal health care coverage." OK, but neither does Bradley. Far from "political utopianism"—as the editors called it last week—Bradley's plan is a slightly more ambitious version of Gore's incremental approach. This makes it politically safe but, for the same reason, leaves it well short of universal coverage.

But at least Bradley concentrates his resources on a few big projects instead of sprinkling them among countless micro-initiatives, right? Actually, he advocates a lot of the same small, boring things as Gore: an expanded Earned Income Tax Credit, universal preschool, the Conservation Reserve Program, and so forth. His issue papers are filled with the kinds of ideas that Clinton would get to somewhere around the three hundred thirty-seventh minute of a State of the Union address: "enlist active older Americans to mentor children," "transferring the Packers and Stockyard Administration from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of Justice," "near shore wetland-restoration programs, including riparian land reforestation," etc. There's nothing wrong with any of this—I can't think of a single reason why riparian land should *not* be reforested, so long as the riparians themselves don't object. But it's hardly a "big idea."

What it is, rather, is Clintonism disguised as anti-Clintonism. At first, this appealed to Democrats (and disillusioned liberal journalists) jilted by Clinton. Bradley, like any rebound boyfriend, realizes that his allure lies in being unlike the other guy. He is there to listen to tales of heartbreak. At every turn he invites people, "Tell me your story."

After a while, though, it begins to grow tired. The more different Bradley tries to appear, the more obvious it becomes that he is the same. "You won't have to wonder what I'll do as president," he tells one crowd. "I want to be president of the United States to do good." That clarifies things, doesn't it?

JONATHAN CHAIT

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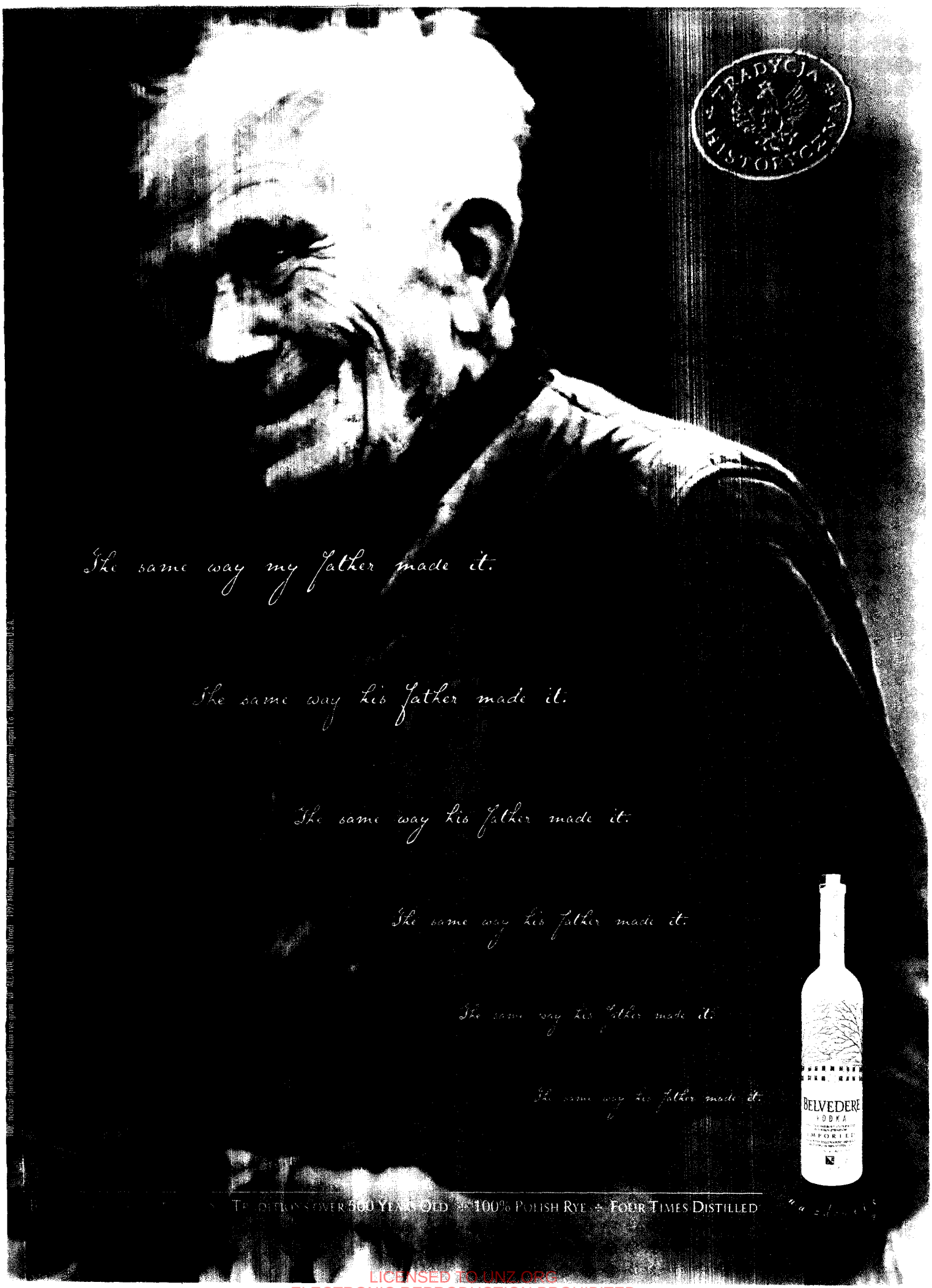
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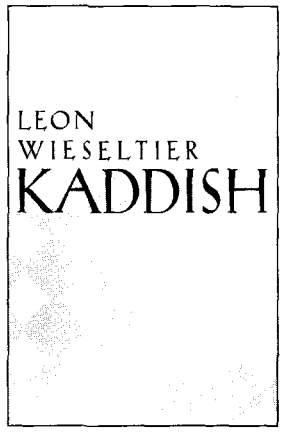

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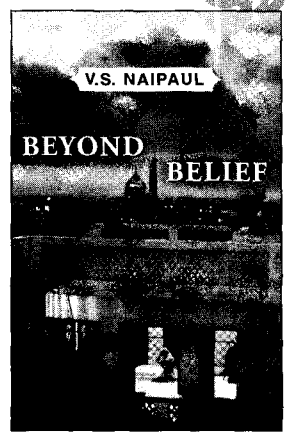

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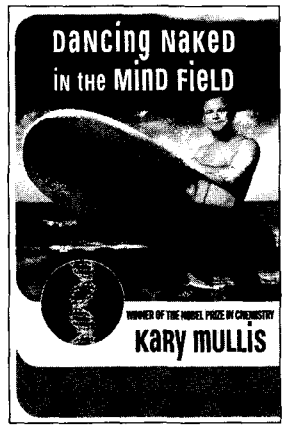

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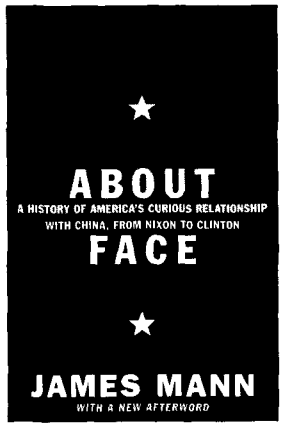

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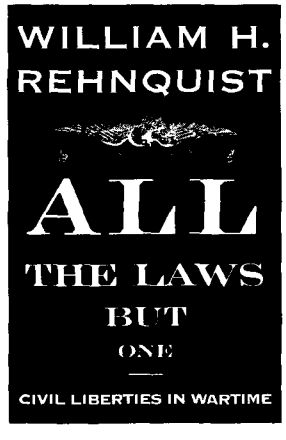

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Rudy's Crew

EVER SINCE THE O.J. Simpson and Rodney King trials, conventional wisdom has held, grimly, that jurors in racially charged cases cannot objectively examine the evidence and come, after deliberation, to a transracial agreement. In a limited sense, then, the acquittal of the four New York City police officers charged with murdering Amadou Diallo may be cause for hope.

Far from dividing on racial lines, a jury of blacks and whites together examined the evidence and plausibly concluded that the state had not proved the relevant criminal charges beyond a reasonable doubt. The jurors in Albany were a model of calm deliberation in the midst of a political storm.

But their verdict must not be the end. Now that the officers have been acquitted, the city of New York should pay, and pay heavily, for the police's negligence. And the correct means for such redress is a wrongful-death suit in state court. The other vehicle under discussion, possible federal charges, would be a mistake. THE NEW REPUBLIC has long opposed using the federal civil rights statutes—as they were used in the King case—to retry in federal court charges that produced criminal acquittals in state court. Because there is no reason to believe that the state court jury ignored the evidence or that a civil remedy in state court would be inadequate, the Justice Department should stay its hand.

The most important response to Diallo's killing is not legal but political. Minorities in New York, like minorities in other large cities, often feel they are living in a police state. And these feelings are understandable, since the burdens of aggressive crime control fall overwhelmingly on their neighborhoods and families. The resulting social crisis cannot be resolved with individual lawsuits; it can be resolved only with the focused attention of elected officials at every level of government—attention that is sorely lacking in the administration of New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani.

We are all familiar with the mayor's much-imitated crime-control strategy, whereby plainclothes officers patrolling minority neighborhoods aggressively stop and frisk anyone who raises their suspicions. That strategy has been successful, and New Yorkers of all races should applaud the resulting drop in crime. But, as currently carried out, the policy has serious problems. And, unless modified, it will turn more and more citizens against the police, eventually undoing the popular support an effective police force must enjoy. Many such modifications have recently been proposed. It would be nice if Giuliani regarded them seriously rather than as attacks on his authority.

No officer, black or white, can be expected to put himself in a situation where he is unable to respond instantly to a perceived threat. And, in a world where unlicensed guns are rampant and in situations where policemen's identities are not readily apparent, there are bound to be tragic misunderstandings and overreactions. Simply requiring the police to wear uniforms and to ask citizens questions that confirm the reasonable suspicion that a crime has been committed, which is the constitutional requirement for a nonconsensual stop, might diminish the risk of violence. More focused reforms—such as the refinement of stun-gun technology so the police can immobilize someone they perceive as a threat without killing him—may also save lives.

But broader reforms are needed as well. There is no necessary contradiction between vigorous policing—which benefits all citizens, black and white—and a society in which residents of black and Hispanic neighborhoods do not feel that they are under alien occupation. But one group of citizens should not bear the burdens of stop-and-frisk tactics from which other groups are exempt—as is now the case. One way of forcing politicians to equalize this burden would be to expand stop-and-frisk drug enforcement into rich neighborhoods as well as poor ones. When innocent white citizens experience the indignities that innocent black citizens experience daily, they will force politicians to ensure that police have individualized suspicion of criminal behavior before they resort to potentially violent stop-and-frisk tactics. If the Diallo verdict achieves nothing else, it should make it clear that one group of citizens cannot be asked to systematically endure dragnet searches and seizures while other groups of citizens are systematically spared. More and more New Yorkers, of all races and political persuasions, are coming to this conclusion. When will the mayor? ■

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NOTEBOOK

SHOW OF FORCE: At long last, the United Nations is doing something about the massive war that for the last 18 months has bloodied the Congo and seven of its neighbors. On February 24 the United Nations agreed to send 500 military observers, plus 5,000 troops to protect them, to central Africa. Alas, these troops may not only be too late—the fighting has already killed 100,000 people and internally displaced almost a million—but they're almost certainly too little. To halt the war in Sierra Leone, a country one-thirty-third the size of the Congo, the United Nations initially dispatched 6,000 troops in October 1999 and then authorized an additional 5,000 troops last month. To stop the fighting in East Timor, a country one-one-hundred-and-fifty-eighth the size of the Congo, 9,000 U.N. troops are on their way. So what's stopping the United Nations from sending a serious, proportionate force to the Congo? Unfortunately, the United States. During U.N. Security Council deliberations, several countries—led by France, Canada, and Namibia—supported sending more troops, but the United States insisted on only 5,000. Before the vote, President Clinton proclaimed, "We have learned the hard way in the U.S. over decades and decades that the costliest peace is far cheaper than the cheapest war." But what about the cheapest peace?

IS THAT YOUR FINAL ANSWER?: Last fall, when George W. Bush failed a pop quiz of world leaders, many observers rushed to his defense, claiming that a mechanical recitation of not-so-famous names did not necessarily translate into the kind of foreign-policy expertise a president needs. But others found the flub disturbing and hoped the Texas governor would redeem himself with a Clintonian display of mnemonic facility. Strangely enough, Bush himself seems to be among them. How else to explain his challenge this week to a moderator in Richmond, Virginia? Bush challenged the man to quiz him on the name of India's president, one of the figures whose names he failed to recall during the earlier examination. The moderator obliged, and Bush, with alarming self-satisfaction, answered "Vajpayee." A good answer, we admit, considering that Atal Behari Vajpayee is indeed an influential figure in Indian politics. But, unfortunately, it was wrong. Vajpayee is the country's prime minister; its president is K.R. Narayanan. Thank goodness those pop quizzes don't translate into the kind of foreign-policy experience you need as president.

KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES: As he continues to make hay out of George W. Bush's appearance at the famously intolerant Bob Jones University, John McCain has crafted a new applause line that not only castigates Bush but conjures the GOP's modern-day patron saint. "We are the party of Ronald Reagan and not Bob Jones," McCain recently boasted at a campaign rally in California. But the two parties aren't mutually exclusive. Not only did Reagan appear at Bob Jones during his 1980 presidential campaign, a fact Bush frequently brings up in his own defense, but Reagan maintained his ties to the school even after he was elected. In 1981 the Gipper appointed Bob Jones faculty member George Youstra to be an undersecretary in the Department of Education. It's one thing to pander to the fringes during a campaign; it's considerably worse to give them jobs after you win. How about a Republican Party of neither Ronald Reagan nor Bob Jones? We're not holding our breath.

STAND BY ME: After failing to deliver the Michigan primary to George W. Bush, Governor John Engler loyally fell on his sword. He did not merely accept the blame for Bush's defeat, he welcomed it in a comically obsequious fashion—volunteering that he had nixed TV commercials that might have swung more Republican votes to the Texas governor. But a man can take only so much humiliation. Now, it seems, Engler is trying to regain some dignity. Recently, one of his allies, Rusty Hills, asserted that Engler's organizing had directly accounted for 300,000 of Bush's votes in the state. "Imagine what the final result would have been without Engler going to the mat for him," Hills told *The New York Times*. Yes, imagine: Bush would have received about 20 percent of the vote. Is that plausible? Probably not. But the implication is that Bush only got within eight points of John McCain because hundreds of thousands of voters utterly indifferent to the Texas governor were marched to the polls by Engler's powerful machine. So much for loyalty.

GRAY MATTER: When Democrats are in the minority, as they are in the U.S. House and Senate, they positively *love* campaign finance reform. But, when they have enough power to actually enact it, they're decisively less enthusiastic. Or, in the case of California today, downright hostile. Democrats in the Golden State control the governor's office and both houses of the state legislature—and they're using that perch to frantically undermine Proposition 25, a campaign finance reform initiative that California voters will consider on March 7. Prop 25 would sharply limit campaign contributions, require overnight disclosure of online donations of more than $1,000, stop corporate donations, establish specific times for fund-raising, and create publicly funded advertising credits for candidates who agree to limit campaign spending. Governor Gray Davis—a fund-raising master who tallied $13.2 million in political contributions in 1999—is hard at work drumming up opposition, helping collect as much as $1.3 million in contributions from business groups to defeat the measure. And what do national campaign finance reform crusaders like Al Gore—who just this week told California voters, in an interview with the *San Jose Mercury News*, that "[w]e need campaign finance reform"—think about this state-level intransigence by a fellow Democrat? Well, Gore campaign spokesman Doug Hattaway says that, with the exception of a California ballot measure seeking to restrict marriage to heterosexuals, the vice president "avoids taking positions on state and local ballot measures." But it shouldn't be too hard to divine Gore's position on Prop 25. Davis is his California campaign chairman.

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AND JIM HUNT AS DARTH VADER: As John McCain wields his toy light saber and tells voters that he feels "like Luke Skywalker trying to get out of the Death Star," it's hard not to view the Republican establishment as the evil empire. But, as evil empires go, the Republican establishment is pretty feeble—at least compared to its Democratic counterpart and the iron-fisted control it exercises over its primary process. After George McGovern's victory in the 1972 Democratic presidential primary and his subsequent drubbing in the general election, the Democratic National Committee searched for ways to prevent similar insurgencies in the future. In 1982 a party commission—led by North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt—created just such a way: "superdelegates." According to party rules, only Democratic congressmen, governors, national committee members, and other party leaders can be superdelegates. They are in essence free agents—not beholden to any caucus or primary results—who can vote for whomever they choose at the Democratic convention, and they account for roughly 18 percent of all delegates. (Note to George W. Bush: This sort of thing might have given some actual teeth to all those endorsements you're so proud of.) The Democratic Party, unlike the GOP, also forbids open primaries in all but two states. That's an underappreciated reason why John McCain's insurgency has done better than Bill Bradley's. Democrats, of course, are thoroughly enjoying McCain's independent-fueled attack on the GOP establishment. Rather than crowing, perhaps they should ponder their claim to be the more open of the two parties. And the fact that their refusal to let non-Democrats vote in their primaries keeps their party small and insular. Which is probably what the DNC wanted all along.

THE DOCTOR IS IN: We are delighted to announce the publication of Sherwin B. Nuland's new book, *The Mysteries Within: A Surgeon Reflects on Medical Myths*, which has just been published by Simon and Schuster. It is, like all of his writings, a form of health care, for the body and for the mind. ■

VINT'S WEEK

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Dear Village
Dumbbell

By Douglas McGrath

Dear Village,

It is I, Fyodor Pashenko, chairman of the Young Russians for a Perfect Tomorrow. This is now my third week in the country of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Britney Spears. I am trying my hardest to make sense of democracy so we in Russia can leave our political chaos behind, but so far the chaos looks preferable.

I have been with Texas Governor George W. Bush, who has been hysterical over his loss in the Michigan primary. Yesterday I found him rocking back and forth on the floor, clutching his stock portfolio, saying, "Don't panic. Still got the trust fund." To cheer him up, Bob Jones III gave him a Mother Teresa dartboard.

When I arrived at Bush's mansion, he and his family and advisers were gathered in the recreation room, trying to figure out how the governor could win something called Super Tuesday. It was hard to hear because the person on the weight bench kept making grunting sounds, but no one wanted to say "Be quiet!" to Barbara Bush. As she pumped, we played Bob Jones's version of the board game Life. (It's called "Pro-Life.") Former President Bush landed on a square that read, "You develop romantic feelings for a girl named Moesha. Lose a turn."

"Look, gang," Governor Bush said. "Media's on a Johnny Mac honeymoon, and I don't think I'm just being paranormal. Sure, we lost New Hampshire. Sure, we lost Michigan. Sure, we lost Arizona. But then we sweep American Samoa and nobody writes *word one* about it! First thing we do is correct this image of me as a spoiled baby who lacks the—uh, what's that dang word they always say I don't have? Starts with a 'v.'"

Mrs. Bush: "Vagina?"

I think it was "vision," but the governor forgot all about it when he landed on a square that read, "You run a red light and total the pope's car. Win $200." He bumped chests with Bob Jones.

Karl Rove told the governor that he needs to portray himself as a reformer with results.

"Well, we're golden there, Rover-man," Bush replied, "'cause I'm for campaign reform finance."

"It's campaign finance reform," Ralph Reed called out from the bench, where he was spotting Mrs. Bush.

The governor glared at Mr. Reed and said, "*Whatever.* They also allegate that I'm not smart enough to be president. I think I've showed I can learn. Remember back when they pop-q'd me on who the Indian prime minister was? I admit I thought it was a trick. Everybody knows Indians have chiefs. OK, so Bush Jr. was ten yards short of the play information-wise on that one: apparently the feather-tops now call it a prime minister. Didn't know it then, *know it now.* People hold me to such unfair standards. Reagan didn't have to know foreign countries! Only foreign leader he knew was Margaret Hatcher. Plus, he got to use those cards, too! How come y'all won't let me use cards?"

"Governor, please," Mr. Rove said. "We agreed not to talk about the cards anymore. Stay focused. Try to name some things you've reformed."

"OK," the governor said. "I am a reformer who has reformed a lot of things in need of reforming and let me get real pacific about what they are."

Mr. Rove snapped his fingers. "Sir, the word is specific. With an 's.'"

The governor shrugged. "OK, there, Rover. I didn't know it was plural."

President Bush leaned over to Mr. Rove. "I swear Yale was harder when I went there," he said.

Mr. Rove once again addressed the governor. "Try to name an actual thing you've reformed."

The governor chewed his lip for a minute. "I know one thing I've reformed. My campaign. It used to be nice, and now it's not. Plus, we've reformed our tar lawns."

Hearing this, Mrs. Bush dropped a barbell on Mr. Reed's foot. "*Good God, George!*" she said. "*Tort laws.*"

"Oh!" he said, looking relieved. "Ever since I signed that dang bill, I wondered what a tar lawn was. Anyway, it just shows I don't have to know what it is to reform it. I will reform any problem from the Atlantic to the Specific. And I'll do it with dignity. 'Cause this is America and I'm an American person. And that's the facts."

There was a long silence. Then Mr. Rove said, "I don't think we better go with reform as an issue. Let's get back to push-polling."

"I'm ready!" Pat Robertson called out from the Stairmaster. He picked up a telephone and dialed a number. "Hello?" he said. "This is Senator John McCain calling. Do you have any pregnant women in the house? You're pregnant yourself? Well, that's wonderful! 'Cause I'd like to come over right now and ABORT YOUR BABY WITH MY TWO BARE HANDS! It's something I learned in the '60s when I became a FLAG-BURNING, GOD-HATING SPY FOR THE NORTH VIETNAMESE!"

Governor Bush looked bored. He turned to me and whispered, "Hey, listen there, Fyo-yo. I'm in a jam, chemical-wise. Now that my dad helped turn your country from a totalitarian dictatorship into a lawless pit of vice, what's the Russian market on ecstasy? My supplier, Sammy the Bull, just got collared."

But, before I could reply, Mrs. Bush got off the Cybex. "I'm ready for my free-weight squats," she said. "Who can spot me?"

"Don't look at me," President Bush said nervously. "I gotta go jump out of a plane." On his way out, he whispered to me, "*Easier on the back.*"

"Just a sec there, Mama Bear," Governor Bush said obligingly. He took a last spin on the wheel of Pro-Life. As it

Douglas McGrath is a writer and filmmaker.

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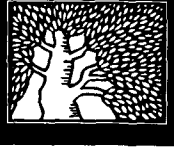

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turned, he said a little prayer: "If this lands on something good, I'm going to win the California primary." The wheel stopped. He counted the squares and his face lit up. The square said, "It's Martin Luther King Jr. Day. You don't give your employees the day off. Advance 20 squares."

He pumped the air and smiled. "The compassionate conservative is back on top!" ■

New York Dispatch

Black Like Him

By HANNA ROSIN

LESS THAN AN hour after the verdict in Albany, Amadou Diallo's neighbors clustered around the Bronx doorstep where he'd been shot. Most nights, they are an uneasy mix—African Americans, Latinos, and African immigrants. But tonight they seemed to speak from one gut. The cops compared the scene to a water-main break, an angry surge aimed directly at them. "Murderers! Murderers!" the neighbors yelled at the riot police, like the vengeful chorus of an opera.

By nightfall the crowd had found its collective voice in one Ali McCoy, self-appointed street preacher and disciple of Al Sharpton. "As of February 25 we are second-class citizens," McCoy said to his girlfriend but also to everyone else. "If you have children, tell them the truth: that in America, history repeats itself. In America, the black man is always a slave."

As McCoy preached, someone else choreographed—a town-crier type who called himself Sealey. "Come see what they could not see," Sealey sang from the stoop as he ushered people in and out of the infamous vestibule, now a makeshift shrine. Inside they could see bullet holes, but most importantly they could *see*, certainly well enough to make out a wallet (the object the cops mistook for a gun). On their way out people scribbled on the walls: "Cop Killers" or "Die Bastards" or "What a Sin," their rage refreshed.

But, as the night wore on, a shadow crowd gathered at the fringes, apart from the rabble. They were the neighborhood's African immigrants, distinguishable by their imitation job-interview clothes: cheap fabrics neatly tucked in. They were thin, for the most part, and some of the men held hands. None of them stood in line for Sealey's tour or followed the crowd's angry rhythm.

In most dissections of New York's reaction to the verdict, Diallo's fellow African immigrants have been drowned out. But their take diverges from the standard civil rights line in important ways. In the street narrative, America is a pit of injustice, a country that disappoints over and over again. But the immigrant narrative is not as cynical; to them, this country is still the open terrain of their dreams, the place they imagine, someday, will give them college degrees, nice homes, good schools for their kids.

THE TENSION SHOWS up between Kadiatou Diallo, the dead man's famously dignified mother, and Al Sharpton. When Kadi, as she is known, arrived from Guinea, Sharpton smuggled her off to his own hotel and made her his keynote speaker. And, for the first few months, she followed along.

Eventually, though, Kadi became alienated from her new American friend. She fired his dream team of lawyers—Johnnie Cochran and company—and hired a white man. In April, Sharpton planned for her a 16-city speaking tour against police brutality. But the tour collapsed after the first two stops. Press reports traced the falling-out to a speech in Chicago, where Sharpton pointed to Kadi and told the crowd that her son, like most immigrants, was deluded, that he came here in search of protection and found himself brutalized by the police. But Kadi did not buy that. "He was in the right place!" she told *The New York Times*. "He loved America more than most Americans."

The immigrants are not wholly sanguine. Used to countries where they are the majority, they often find America isolating. And the verdict, from a nation they associated with the rule of law, unnerved them and made them feel vulnerable, unprotected. Yet there is a limit to their rage. Although they felt bitter, betrayed, and disappointed, the African immigrants milling around Brooklyn on verdict night kept their distance from the hot-headed black-power rhetoric.

Dem Bocar emigrated in 1995 from a city in Guinea not far from Diallo's. He found an apartment in Elmhurst, Queens, a mostly white neighborhood, because black Americans "scared me," he said. "I did not feel comfortable in their company."

The decision costs him. Sometimes, when he gets home late after driving his cab all night, he has what he now thinks of as close calls. "I'm afraid of them, your cops," he said as he stood near Diallo's old house, watching the protests from across the street. "When I come home from my job late at night, I can see them, going around and around and looking at me real seriously. But I didn't do nothing wrong."

But, as the protesters threatened to burst through the barricades, shouting "Stop killer cops! Stop killer cops!" Bocar withdrew into old-world fatalism. "I was surprised," he said about the verdict, struggling to find a reason why what the cops did made sense. "But I can accept it. We Muslims believe in destiny. Before he came to this country, this was his destiny, coming here first, then living here, then dying. I believe that. And I think Diallo would say the same thing."

Abdul Diallo (no relation—Diallo is a common name in Guinea), who's been in the United States only a year, squired his even greener cousin over to a distant corner when the protests got more heated. Asked about the verdict, he said only, "I did not study it yet." Then he went silent. Just then McCoy and his posse passed by: "Rage at the cops in America!" they shouted. "Wake-up call ... second-class citizens. Racist America!"

Hearing that, Abdul Diallo spoke up again. "I want to say one thing," he said. "I love America. I do not think America killed Diallo." America, he said, will teach him to use a com-

HANNA ROSIN covers religion for *The Washington Post*.

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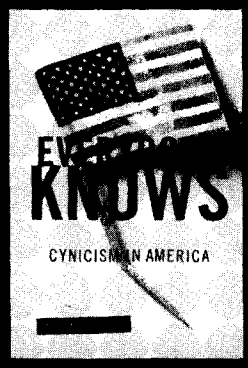

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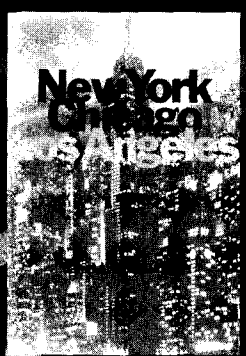

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puter and will give him a better paycheck. America, he says, "will make me a first-class citizen. Not second-class."

Alma Tesfai, a striking Eritrean woman, sat silently on the stoop next to her daughter all night. She came, she said, because Amadou Diallo was a beautiful man and because she could see how his shooting had happened. After only three days in the United States, her brother was pulled over and frisked by police. "Since that day I don't feel secure," she said. "The way they look at you," she said of the cops in her neighborhood, "it makes you feel bad."

To Tesfai, the verdict seems unjust and the cops' 41 bullets barbaric. Still, she struggles to understand those four cops. "Maybe they got scared because so many people have guns on this block. Maybe they were just young."

All night Tesfai had avoided Sealey's beckoning, although she sat right at his feet. What would she write on those walls? she wondered. And where would she get a pen? When she wondered aloud, Sealey handed her one. No more excuses now not to "see what they could not see."

"Mom, what did you write?" her daughter asked when she emerged. "It's in Tigrean," she said, then offered a loose translation: "God bless you, Amadou. I know you're in heaven. I want us all to be like your mother, and to accept." ■

Chicago Dispatch

Karta Before the Horse

By NEAL POLLACK

THE MICHAEL JORDAN-LESS Chicago Bulls may be playing to empty seats, but there's still one show that can draw a crowd to the United Center: Louis Farrakhan. On February 27, roughly 20,000 people packed the sports arena to hear him deliver his annual "Saviours' Day" address—a sort of State of the Nation of Islam speech that capped the group's four-day convention. And this year the speech was an even hotter ticket than usual: it was Farrakhan's first public appearance since the December press conference at which the famously bigoted and anti-Semitic minister, fresh from a "near-death" bout with prostate cancer, proclaimed himself a changed man.

In December, after nearly a year of cancer-related seclusion, Farrakhan had emerged to apologize for all the nasty things he'd said about Jews and whites. "Only through our act of atonement can we be forgiven for what we have said or done to injure other human beings," he said. He pledged to "spend the rest of my days working to uplift a fallen humanity, regardless of their color, their race, or their creed." Farrakhan, it seemed, was going mainstream: no more hatred, no more paranoia, no more conspiracy theories. And some in the mainstream—noting Malcolm X's transformation as a precedent—seemed eager to take him at his word. The *Chicago Sun-Times* called Farrakhan's statements "encouraging"; columnist Clarence Page labeled his new outlook on life "heartwarming."

And, in some ways, the Saviours' Day convention *was* a testament to the Nation of Islam's mainstreaming. With discounted hotel rooms at the nearby Holiday Inn and Best Western, special airfares offered by Southwest and American Trans Air ("Use Convention Code 030100 when making an ATA reservation," the Saviours' Day website instructed), and a kung fu demonstration and junior science fair for the conventioneers' children, Saviours' Day had all the trappings of any gathering of professionals or hobbyists. Indeed, sharing space with the Nation at the McCormick Place convention center were an American Kennel Club show and a meeting of the Chicago Dental Society.

To reinforce the point, this year's gathering marked the first time the Nation—long-known for a heretical theology based on a flying saucer and a sorcerer named Yakub—had sought, and apparently received, the support of orthodox Muslims. As part of his evolution, Farrakhan now adheres to more traditional Islamic practices, like praying on Fridays and fasting during Ramadan. And, in recognition, Sayyid Syeed, the leader of the four-million-plus-member Islamic Society of North America, showed up at the convention. Even Wallace Deen Muhammad, the son of former Nation leader Elijah Muhammad who in the mid-'70s split with Farrakhan to form his own orthodox Muslim sect and eventually became the most prominent black imam in the United States, was a constant presence throughout the weekend. This was a "family reunion of all of Islam," Muhammad proclaimed.

BUT OLD LUNACIES die hard. There was the flickering image of Muammar Qaddafi, beamed live via satellite to welcome conference attendees. There were the video highlights from Farrakhan's world tour of Islamic nations—played as a warm-up to his speech—featuring Qaddafi, Yasir Arafat, and that great Islamic leader, Fidel Castro. And, of course, there was Farrakhan, who sounded suspiciously like, well, Farrakhan. He opened his bombastic, roughly two-hour address by announcing, "It has come to my attention that the National Security Agency of the United States government has been recruiting young college students and filling them with vicious lies about myself and the Nation of Islam, its aim and purpose, and sending these young men and women in among us, to destabilize us, to take advantage of my absence and to try to weaken the faith, the resolve, and the commitment of the believers to the mission of the resurrection of our people."

But the speech wasn't Farrakhan's biggest problem. The biggest obstacle to his effort to recast the Nation as mainstream, unprejudiced, and philo-Semitic came from an unlikely source: Jews. At this year's convention, Farrakhan proudly unveiled a new weapon meant to finally vanquish

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the charges of anti-Semitism that have dogged him for so long. He flew in, from Jerusalem and Brooklyn, several ultra-orthodox rabbis from the Neturei Karta sect to vouch for his newfound appreciation of the Jewish people. But Farrakhan's Jews didn't quite seem to appreciate the Jewish people much themselves. In fact, the rabbis were a little behind the times. They hadn't come to support the new Farrakhan; they had come because they liked the old Farrakhan.

Neturei Karta, which believes that Zionism violates Jewish law, has a long history of backing political figures precisely *because* they denounce the Jewish state; Yasir Arafat has been an ally since the 1970s. The group has even called the Holocaust God's punishment for the Jewish settlement of Palestine. So, instead of playing up Farrakhan's newfound tolerance, Rabbi David Weiss told the United Center crowd that Israel was an "abomination of God." Bellowed Weiss, "We apologize for the chutzpah, the nerve of the Zionist leaders who attack the honorable Minister Farrakhan. All those who have called you an anti-Semite, let them be shamed.... All those who say they are Jews who speak ill of Mr. Farrakhan are not Jews." The old Louis Farrakhan couldn't have said it better himself. ■

Dobrosin Dispatch

Déjà Vu

By Elizabeth Rubin

Back in January 1999, upon hearing that some 45 Kosovar Albanians had been massacred in the village of Racak, Madeleine Albright turned to Sandy Berger and said, "Spring has come early." The massacre eventually led to the failed peace talks in Rambouillet, France, and to NATO's war against Slobodan Milosevic last March. Today, despite the 50,000 NATO troops in Kosovo, it appears spring has arrived early in the Balkans once again, bringing not daffodils but a new conflict in southern Serbia and another carefully orchestrated destabilization of Kosovo by Milosevic.

In Gnjilane, the biggest town in the American-patrolled sector of Kosovo, the shop windows are posted with signs reading DON'T FORGET PRESEVO, PRESEVO IS KOSOVO and maps of Kosovo with a gray, crescent-shaped area hugging the region's eastern border. Though they live outside the borders of Kosovo, 80 percent of the inhabitants of the Presevo valley in southwestern Serbia are Albanian. They claim this 480-square-mile swath—mostly highland villages, except for the towns of Presevo, Medveda, and Bujanovac—was swapped after World War II for Leposavic, a region in northern Kosovo near Mitrovica inhabited mostly by Serbs, as part of Tito's efforts to foster unity among his country's various nationalities. In the early '90s, when independence referenda were breaking out all over the former Yugoslavia, most Albanians in the Presevo region voted for autonomy and the right to join Kosovo. The outside world paid them little attention. But, not long ago, a group of restless former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) soldiers from the region, fed up with the world's indifference, took up arms and, predictably, incited the wrath of the Serbian police. And now another chapter in the Balkan wars is under way.

Last weekend, a former KLA officer decided to introduce a few foreign journalists to the new army. We trekked across the snowy fields that form the border between Kosovo and Serbia to a mountain village turned into a garrison town—only a few children playing in the streets, stray dogs picking at cow ribs, boarded-up homes, and clandestine armed men. We were greeted by about half a dozen men with Kalashnikovs. Their uniforms, which once belonged to the KLA, are now marked with the emblems of the Liberation Army of Presevo, Medveda, and Bujanovac (or UCPMB, in Albanian).

A bearded, elegantly dressed civilian in a blue overcoat and a silk ascot spoke for the group. In a thick French Swiss accent, he said he's been involved for decades in Albanian liberation movements and, now that Kosovo is on the road to freedom, he's transferred his energies back to his homeland in southern Serbia. "We thought the international community would react, since the problem was always here," he said. But, when the West did nothing, "people started to think among themselves." And "a new little army" sprang up among the region's Albanians seeking to defend themselves.

According to this man, the UCPMB made its formal debut on January 26. Like most founding myths, this one has several versions. One of the more plausible ones involves Shefket Hasani, a reedy 55-year-old idealist with thick white hair, a deeply creased face, and threadbare jeans whom I met in the same village the next night. Like the man in the blue overcoat, Hasani had lived in exile in Switzerland for most of his life, then fought with the KLA, only returning to the village of his birth in Serbia after the NATO war "to spill blood for his land." Last October he was repairing his roof when he heard Serbian police entering the village. Shefket grabbed a gun and sprayed them with gunfire—missing all of them. When the police came to arrest him in January, he and a few men opened fire again, this time wounding one policeman. As the Serbian police retreated, they retaliated by killing two Albanian brothers heading home from chopping firewood in the hills. At the funeral the next day, men with guns appeared for the first time in the uniforms of the UCPMB.

Whether or not Shefket's story is accurate, many believe it encapsulates the UCPMB's plan, which is closely modeled on the KLA. First they will start an armed resistance aimed at Serbian police; the Serbs will overreact, killing and expelling civilians; and NATO will be forced to come to the rescue. The man in the blue overcoat assured us his group had no intention of provoking Serb reprisals. But, just a few hours after one of his men, Fatmir Ibishi, escorted us back to the

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mountain border with Kosovo, the same Ibishi ambushed a Serbian police checkpoint with his comrades. A Serbian police chief was killed; three men were wounded. Ibishi was also killed, leaving his wife and children behind in Kosovo.

Many of the rest of the Albanians in Presevo are panicking. They dare not leave their houses after five o'clock in the afternoon, and in the past few days buses of refugees have trundled into Kosovo. But, while most residents agree with the UCPMB that the army's actions will incite the Serbs, they are less sanguine that NATO will rush to their defense. The common view among Albanians both inside and outside Kosovo is that, as Baton Haxhiu, the editor-in-chief of Kosovo's popular daily *Koha Ditore*, said recently, "the West's humanitarian-intervention switch has been turned off." Haxhiu is not far off the mark. Although American troops have recently set up a small monitoring base near the border with southwestern Serbia, as one KFOR official put it, "if there's problems in the area, we have no mandate to operate in Serbia." And, the official adds, even if the Yugoslav army expels southwestern Serbia's 80,000 Albanians into Kosovo, "I don't think the international community will intervene and precipitate a wider conflict to help these people."

Not surprisingly, then, the UCPMB hasn't garnered much support from the population it purports to represent. In fact, according to one story, rather than welcoming the UCPMB to his sons' funeral, the father of the two Albanians killed in retaliation for Shefket's attack on the Serbian police blamed the UCPMB for their deaths.

Shefket remains undaunted. "If it comes to the worst," he said, "and Serbs torture the women and children, KFOR is just two kilometers away; but, even if they don't want to help us, we are prepared, because we are used to it." Shefket is also hoping to get at least some support from his former KLA counterparts in Kosovo. And he just might. "We will try and prevent any armed provocation," says Shaqir Shaqiri, a deputy officer in the Kosovo Protection Corps—a kind of national guard made up mostly of KLA soldiers. But, he pointedly added, speaking not as an official but as a man from Presevo, "if our people are killed or tortured and not aided by the international community, we will not tolerate it, and we will aid them."

IF THE UCPMB is a nuisance for NATO, for Milosevic it's more like a gift. The higher the group's profile, the easier it is for the Serbian president to present the conflict as one between bandit terrorists and the forces of law and order—although Serbian troops actually began forcing Albanians from the Presevo valley long before the UCPMB arrived on the scene.

Milosevic's objectives are murky. He may be hoping to swap the territory for the area around northern Mitrovica, where the Serbs in Kosovo are as marooned as the Albanians are in Serbia. Or he may be aiming to further destabilize Kosovo—for, if he expels 80,000 Albanians into Kosovo, many of them may well turn their wrath on the Serbs of Gnjilane and Mitrovica. In short, says Blerim Shala, editor of *Zeri*, an influential Kosovar daily, "[w]e are now sitting on three powder kegs, Mitrovica, Montenegro, and now Presevo—and Milosevic has the remote controls." ■

The people responsible for John McCain.

Independents Day

By JOHN B. JUDIS

"I WANT TO thank all the Republicans who voted for me," George W. Bush said shortly after independents and Democrats put John McCain over the top in Michigan. "I think the interesting thing is, I won overwhelming support among Republicans and like-minded independents." In other words, the independents who backed McCain weren't really independent at all; they were Democrat sympathizers. The idea's not so far-fetched. In 1992 Raymond Wolfinger and five other political scientists argued in *The Myth of the Independent Voter* that independents do not have a distinct political identity but "are largely closet Democrats and Republicans." And closet Democrats, the Bush campaign insists, shouldn't decide Republican primaries.

Unfortunately for Bush, Wolfinger's theory, which appeared on the eve of Ross Perot's presidential candidacy, is out-of-date. While independents used to be a heterogeneous stew, over the course of the past few elections they have developed a common identity. Independents played a decisive role in Perot's impressive showing in 1992, the Republican capture of the House in 1994, and the Democratic takeover of California state politics in 1998. The press is treating McCain's surge as something new, but it's not. It's a continuation of the dominant story in American politics over the last decade: the rise of a new class of voters.

Most independents live along the country's northern tier—from Maine and New Hampshire to the Pacific Northwest and California, including the Midwest and Colorado. They tend to be white, Protestant, suburban, middle-income high school graduates who may have attended college but probably did not earn degrees. Like Republicans, they distrust big government; like Democrats, they distrust big business. Their mantra is the one put forward by McCain and Perot: ending Washington's domination by "special interests." They are pro-choice and leery of the religious right; they worry about Democratic spending programs and Republican tax cuts; they think of themselves as moderates rather than as liberals or conservatives. In short, they stand poised between the core voters of the two parties.

It's hard to know how many independents there are. If you go by party registration, they represent between ten and 15 percent of the electorate. But this is probably an undercount, since many self-identified independents don't register as such because their states bar registered independents from voting in Democratic and Republican primaries. In New Hampshire, where independents can vote in either party's

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primary, they outnumber Democrats and Republicans. Indeed, the University of Michigan's definitive National Election Studies shows that the number of voters who say they are independents grew from 23 percent of the electorate in 1952 to 36 percent in 1998.

BEFORE 1974, MANY independents were younger voters who had not yet decided which party they preferred. In the South, many had left the pro-civil-rights Democratic Party but had not yet embraced the GOP. But, since Watergate, "independent" has become less of a transitional identity and more of an ideological one, defined by extreme skepticism about government and support for political reform.

Indeed, independents' disenchantment with "politics as usual" helps explain much of the political history of the last two decades. In the early '80s, offended by the Democrats' tax-and-spend policies, independents backed Ronald Reagan and conservative Republicans. In the early '90s, angered by the increased frequency of scandals in Washington and mounting trade and budget deficits, they gravitated to Perot and Bill Clinton. And in 1994, put off by gridlock in Washington, they helped deliver the House and Senate to the GOP. In an extensive and revealing survey of independent voters in 1994, Stanley Greenberg argued that they switched loyalties because Republican House candidates promised "big change in Washington." Greenberg wrote, "They mistrust big business as well as big government and want to see the special interest stranglehold on Washington broken."

But, presciently, Greenberg insisted that independents were endorsing the Republicans' commitment to reform, not the rest of their agenda. In Greenberg's polls, independents said they "really can't trust government to do the right thing," but they wanted to protect Medicare and Social Security and displayed no interest in cutting capital-gains taxes. More identified themselves as moderate than as conservative or liberal. Fifty-eight percent felt abortion should be legal. And, while they backed term limits and a balanced-budget amendment, they also wanted to cap campaign spending.

So after the 1994 election, when the Republicans geared their legislative agenda to the Christian right and the Chamber of Commerce, they lost independents' support. In the 1996 election, independents backed Clinton over Dole 48 percent to 33 percent. Were it not for the campaign scandals that broke in October of that year, Clinton would have won much more decisively, and the Democrats would have recaptured the House on the strength of independents. As it is, the GOP's share of the independent vote has fallen steadily over the course of the last two congressional elections.

This year, independents have again emerged as a distinct bloc committed to political reform. In a *Los Angeles Times* poll last November, 87 percent of independents supported campaign finance reform. In a poll of independents last month, Zogby International found that 81 percent of Illinois independents, compared with 75 percent of Democrats and 69 percent of Republicans, backed limits on campaign donations. In a December poll by the Progressive Policy Institute of California, California independents and Democrats supported a campaign finance reform initiative three to one.

On the economy, independents fall somewhere between Democrats and Republicans. According to Zogby's poll, 19 percent of Missouri Republicans thought "taxes/balanced budget" was "the most important issue facing the country," compared with ten percent of independents and seven percent of Democrats. But independents' social views are much closer to those of Democrats. A majority of Illinois independents are pro-choice. In Missouri, 19 percent of Republicans think "lack of morals" is the most important issue in the country, while only ten percent of independents and five percent of Democrats do. In California, a narrow majority of Democrats and independents back a March initiative banning gay marriage, while Republicans favor it five to one.

IF YOU ACCEPT that independents share a moderate, reform-oriented identity, the argument, peddled by conservative pundits, that McCain's appeal is based simply on his "biography" makes no sense. His appeal rests on his commitment—repeated in every speech—to "stand up to special interests." And it rests on his moderate stance on taxes and Social Security and on his reticence about social issues. (The Christian right's hyperbolic attacks on McCain have clearly benefited him among independents.) Conversely, Bush's current lack of appeal among independents stems from his opposition to political reform, his profligate tax cuts, and his identification with Pat Robertson. Bush can still win the nomination by relying on core Republicans—in the upcoming winner-take-all California primary, for instance, only Republican votes count toward the awarding of delegates—but he cannot win the general election without changing his image among independents.

And that is even truer for other Republicans. The GOP's decline after 1994—when it had reached its highest level of support since 1952—is largely attributable to the defection of independent voters in the North. In California, where Republicans won only two statewide races in 1998, independents have tilted decidedly toward the Democrats. According to a Field poll last year, independents in California believe that Democrats are "more interested in the problems that concern [me] most" by a ratio of two to one. Interestingly, one of the two Republicans to win in 1998, Secretary of State Bill Jones, recently shifted his allegiance from Bush to McCain.

But the recent shift by independents toward the Democrats is not secure. Independents may not be fatigued with Clinton himself, but they remember the administration's illicit and meretricious fund-raising—in which Vice President Al Gore was implicated—in the 1996 election. Bill Bradley's initial surge against Gore was due partly to independent voters' perception of Bradley as a political reformer and of Gore as a Washington insider beholden to lobbyists and campaign contributors. Subsequently, most of those voters gravitated to McCain, but if Gore wins the nomination he will face them in the fall, especially if he is running against McCain. If Gore cannot step out from under the shadow of the administration's campaign scandals, he is likely to lose—no matter how enthusiastically loyal Democrats flock to the polls.

The power of America's new voting bloc will be felt far beyond November. Today's independents resemble the Pro-

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gressives, Populists, and Mugwumps of the late nineteenth century, who, while disagreeing on many economic and social issues, united to support civil-service reform, the direct election of senators, the ballot initiative and referendum, and a prohibition on corporate campaign contributions. In the first decades of the twentieth century, they finally got these measures adopted and in the process paved the way for substantive social and economic reforms that had been bottled up in corrupt legislatures and the courts. Something similar could be taking place today. McCain is only the latest sign. ■

The strange death of the California conservative.

Center Forward

By Douglas Foster

BURLINGAME, CALIFORNIA

In a ritual familiar to Republican moderates in California, Representative Tom Campbell got tagged with hoary epithets at his party's convention last month. Campbell stood stiffly on stage between the two conservatives challenging him for the right to face Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein in the fall, grimacing gamely when he was called an "enemy of the national interest" and accused of advocating "government-funded crack houses." San Diego County Supervisor Bill Horn, one of the conservative challengers, put it most bluntly when, glaring at Campbell, he sneered: "*Professor*, explain to this Republican audience how you are not a *liberal*."

But, moan as they might about Campbell's support for abortion rights, domestic partnership, and campaign finance reform, few rank-and-file Republicans in the hall doubted he would win March 7's GOP Senate primary. In fact, the bash-the-moderate exercise had a vestigial feel. It served—much like the prayer breakfast the next morning, at which the party's chaplain averred that "the last two stages of decadence of any nation that ever fell from within were sacrificing their babies and homosexuality"—as a comforting reminder that social conservatives retain their hold on the state party apparatus even as the party's nominees buck that apparatus on social issues. But, as Campbell's front-runner status demonstrates, the party that produced Ronald Reagan, Bob Dornan, and Dan Lungren is itself changing. Its leaders are determined to recruit women and minorities and to skirt the hard-right image that the party projected for much of the last decade.

Several factors have converged to virtually ensure Campbell's nomination: Republican-defeat fatigue occasioned by a series of disastrous losses at the polls, new election rules (sponsored by Campbell) that allow independents to vote in party primaries, and, perhaps most important, a decision by prominent California Republican donors not to write checks for more conservative candidates this year.

The Republican decline in the Golden State began in 1992, when Bruce Herschensohn, an ultraconservative talk-show host, beat Campbell in the Republican Senate primary and then fell in the general election to Democrat Barbara Boxer. Herschensohn's loss was the first of four GOP Senate defeats in the '90s (Feinstein beat John Seymour in 1992 and Michael Huffington in 1994; Boxer defeated Matt Fong in her reelection campaign in 1998). Then, in the 1998 gubernatorial contest, everything fell apart for the Republicans. Centrist Democrat Gray Davis beat party stalwart Lungren so badly that by the end of the night only two Republicans still held statewide office. Worse, the election drove the state party more than $300,000 into debt. In an internal report prepared afterward, one Republican strategist asserted the GOP was "no longer a competitive statewide party; at best it is a regional party." The fastest-growing segments of the population (Latinos, women, and digital-economy workers), the strategist noted, were proving hostile to Republican candidates. A majority of the state's voters were college graduates, who "have a more tolerant view on social issues—abortion, gay rights, school prayer—and are not receptive to a moralistic message."

Emboldened by this sort of analysis, party moderates began a concerted effort to take back the state GOP. As early as 1996, Campbell sponsored a successful ballot initiative to allow cross-party voting, which would presumably aid centrists like himself. This year, moderates have put up alternative slates for local party offices in seven counties, including Orange and Santa Barbara. In Orange County alone, well-known Republican donors pledged $500,000 to oust the conservative county chairman.

Even some party conservatives are prepared to move toward the center. State Senator Jim Brulte, one of the leading GOP moneymen in California and a prominent conservative, announced that the political action committee he controlled would no longer offer financial support to white men but instead encourage women and minorities to run as Republicans. Says one highly placed state-party official, "I'm not talking about the 'Rockefeller Republicans,' it's just conservative professional guys tired of the kooks. Look, even the people who supported my election were kooks. They were fruitcakes fighting over the fruit."

California's big GOP contributors, worried that hard-right candidates on the ballot in 2000 would damage George W. Bush among swing voters in the general election, voted with their checkbooks. Bush's appearance at a party fund-raiser last year brought in $2.2 million. But the help came with strings attached: expenditure of the money is largely controlled by Brulte, a Bush surrogate who stepped out of his role in the Bush campaign to become finance chair of the state party. "The donors said, 'We're just not going to play,'" Brulte acknowledges.

Because they hoped he would appeal to the burgeoning

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population of swing voters, many pro-Bush donors wanted Campbell on the state ticket. "I'm being discreet because they were private conversations," says the Silicon Valley congressman, "but I've been encouraged by conversations with elected officials and party leaders: I've got the best chance to win, and therefore there will not be a rancorous primary." A fiscal conservative who voted to impeach President Clinton but also voted against Newt Gingrich's reelection as House speaker, Campbell seemed to possess the maverick aura that has been the rage in Republican contests this year, and he seemed ideal for a California campaign.

As Campbell considered a possible Senate candidacy last fall, party officials and fund-raisers waved off other potential contenders, including Silicon Valley businessman Ron Unz, who announced plans to mount a campaign but withdrew after a few fruitless months searching for financial support. Money for Campbell's more conservative opponents dried up, too, leaving them angry but largely impotent in a state where TV ads often matter more than door-to-door campaigning. Ray Haynes, a conservative state senator from Southern California running for the U.S. Senate seat, garnered considerable support from colleagues in the legislature (including Brulte) and from Republican activists. But, with campaign reports showing that he's taken in under $100,000—even less than he has raised for state Senate reelection bids—Haynes is dead in the water.

Haynes predicts that party regulars will feel "betrayed by the Republican establishment, the so-called country club guys" when Campbell is nominated. "The Bush money guys have kind of tacitly thought that the only way we're going to win California is to have Tom Campbell," gripes Haynes before warning, "Tom will get the nomination and George Bush will lose California, because conservatives will stay home in droves." A few conservative party officials have even reconsidered their opposition to campaign finance reform after watching donors wield such naked power.

Where does all this leave Campbell, assuming he wins the nomination on March 7? In an odd and difficult position. First, if conservative activists, alienated by the way the party leadership stacked the deck, don't turn out in November, he doesn't have a chance. Second, even if conservatives do turn out, Feinstein, with her tough-on-crime, no-nonsense style, appeals to precisely the centrist and swing voters Campbell must win over. She leads him by 18 points in a recent head-to-head poll, winning support from one in five Republicans.

Strangest of all, Campbell had been pinning his hopes on Bush, who was supposed to provide a moderate visage atop the ticket and lift Republicans down the line. But Bush's recent lurch to the right—he's complained that independents and Democrats are hijacking the GOP primary—led Bill Jones, California's secretary of state and its highest-ranking Republican elected official, to jump from Bush to McCain. If Bush can't move convincingly back to the middle, California's GOP elites may face an unhappy irony. They chose the moderate congressman because they thought he'd help—or at least not harm—Bush. But it's Bush who might end up sinking Campbell. ■

How Indians took over California politics.

Jackpot

By David Plotz

Paula Lorenzo is not your ordinary welfare-to-work story. Fifteen years ago, Lorenzo found herself with three kids and no husband. She took welfare and food stamps and worked when she could in the fields of California's Central Valley: "I followed the prunes and the tomatoes and the apricots and walnuts." She made her home with her tribe, the Rumsey Band. The tribe, a remnant of the Wintun people who once dominated the hills and valleys north of Sacramento, consisted of just a handful of families. Lorenzo and the other Rumseys lived in four little houses on their postage-stamp-sized reservation, 174 acres of creek and dust in the Capay Valley. Two of the homes still had outhouses. Each year the tribal council solemnly apportioned the "sovereign nation's" revenue—the "$600 or $800 or, in a good year, $1,200" the Rumseys collected from the farmers who rented their land.

Lorenzo, a warm, lively 49-year-old, recounts the story in her conference room, where she sits in a buttery leather chair at the largest table I've ever seen, a 25-foot-long ocean of wood. She is flanked by her chief operating officer, her investment adviser, and her publicist. Lorenzo occasionally glances out the vast window to her left. Below her, hundreds of ant-sized people—most of them Asian-Americans bused in from Sacramento or San Francisco—are playing her slot machines, blackjack tables, and video-poker games. Fifteen years off welfare, 15 years out of the prune fields, Lorenzo is CEO of Cache Creek—pronounced "Cash Creek"—Casino.

By Las Vegas standards, the 417-machine casino is a popgun operation. But it is making the Rumsey Band filthy rich. Each year, after Cache Creek pays off its winners and covers the salaries of its 850 employees, Lorenzo delivers the profits—which she says are in "the lowish eight figures," or at least $10 million—to Rumsey's tribal council, which is chaired by ... Paula Lorenzo. This tax-free cash supports all 42 Rumsey Indians, 21 adults and 21 children. In other words, the tribe takes in at least $230,000 per member per year. It can spend the money however it wants. So far, Rumsey has built a lavish school for the seven kids living on the reservation, endowed a college fund, and finished a water-treatment plant. Unlike some California gambling tribes, Rumsey doesn't make cash payments to members. ("It makes our people lazy," Lorenzo says.) But it does employ many of them in positions such as health liaison or gaming commissioner. The Wintun Indians are known as the Acorn People, and the Rumseys have been squirreling away most of their profits, investing millions in stocks and office buildings. A century ago, white Californians stole Wintun land to

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build the Golden State. Today, the Rumsey Band, made up of a few dozen ex-field hands, owns buildings that house Hewlett-Packard.

Lorenzo's tribe and other California Indians have invested in something else, too: politics. For the past ten years, the tribes have fought California authorities—including, at various times, the governor and the state Supreme Court—over whether their gambling establishments violate the state constitution. The Nevada casino industry, which sees Indian gambling as a threat, has greased California politics with millions of dollars. But just as tribes like the Rumsey Band have overcome poverty, so have they beaten the power brokers at their own game. Over the past three years, the tribes have spent $100 million of their money on politics, including $21 million on a ballot initiative called Proposition 1A, which would establish once and for all the legality of Indian casino gambling. It is, undoubtedly, more money than any group has ever spent in the history of politics—and it is money well spent. When Prop 1A passes on March 7, as it is nearly certain to do, a remarkable transformation will be complete: a tiny group of Indian tribes, once among California's most impoverished dependents, will have become its most fearsome political force.

GAMBLING IN CALIFORNIA has a long and mostly unattractive history. Since the Gold Rush, some California cities have allowed poker-playing in licensed card rooms. "Card clubs," as these establishments came to be known, were a minor entertainment until the 1970s, when small cities devastated by Proposition 13's tax limits embraced them as a source of tax revenue. The industry, concentrated in the Latino-heavy cities around Los Angeles, boomed in the '80s, when clubs began luring thousands of Asian gamblers with a peculiar tile game called Pai Gow poker. One such establishment, the Commerce Casino, was for a time the world's largest casino. By the mid-'90s, annual card-club revenues had soared to $700 million. The state also permits horse racing.

The card-club industry oozed with sleaze. A drug-smuggling operation financed the Bicycle Club, prompting the federal government to seize it in 1990. During the next nine years, while the feds were running the casino, the manager of Asian games was convicted of loan-sharking and extortion, a political consultant hired by the club was indicted for embezzlement, and the feds themselves nearly sold the club to mobsters. The rest of the industry is hardly more savory. Larry Flynt plans to open an enormous Hustler card club in Gardena this spring. Irving Moskowitz, who owns the Hawaiian Gardens card club and bingo parlor, has gained international notoriety by using bingo revenue earmarked for charity to buy Arab property in the West Bank and settle Jews there.

So, when Indian gambling appeared on the scene, some in California saw it as an opportunity to bleach the industry—to channel gambling's windfall profits toward those more deserving of economic success. In California, perhaps more than in any other state, Indians have endured uninterrupted exploitation, brutality, and sorrow. When gold-seeking Anglos flooded California in 1848, they encountered 150,000 native Indians—and devastated them. Disease killed thousands of Indians, while the whites systematically slaughtered, enslaved, and otherwise harassed the rest. In one generation, the Indian population plunged 80 percent, to 30,000. The survivors were expelled from their fertile land and driven into the barren deserts and hills.

In the 1890s, the federal government, having welshed on treaties it struck with California Indians in the 1850s, wrote new agreements. But, while the feds reserved huge parcels of land for Indians in other states, land in California was too valuable, and the white conquest had splintered once-large tribes into tiny bands. So, instead of unifying the bands on big reservations, the government granted each microgroup a miniscule plot. Some large tribes received thousands of acres, but small ones were settled on parcels of hundreds of acres or less. Today California is full of "sovereign nations" the size of parking lots, with fewer residents than a small

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apartment building. (One tribe, the Sheep Ranch Indians, is actually the Sheep Ranch Indian. It has a single member.)

FROM THEN ON, California basically ignored its Indians, right through the 1970s. Reservations were remote and poor, and Indians lacked the numbers to wield much political clout. "Tribal problems were never discussed," says former Lieutenant Governor Leo McCarthy, now a leading opponent of Indian gambling. "No one representing the tribes appeared during the fourteen years I was in the legislature." Then, in the early '80s, the tribes discovered gambling. The Cabazon tribe was first: In 1983, it opened a high-stakes bingo parlor on its Southern California reservation. The state sued to close it, citing state regulations against gambling. But, while the lawsuit ascended to the Supreme Court, leaving the issue in legal limbo, outside investors cut deals with other tribes to build and operate huge bingo parlors. In 1987, the Court settled the Cabazon case in the Indians' favor. A year later, the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) codified the right of sovereign Indian nations to sponsor gambling.

By the early '90s, California's leading gambling tribes wanted to add slot machines, which are more profitable than bingo. Under IGRA, a tribe can't offer Nevada-style gambling (slots, blackjack, etc.) without first signing a "compact" with the governor. But the tribes began installing slot machines anyway, claiming preposterously that their slots were actually video-lottery terminals and thus legal under IGRA. As California suddenly found itself with 30-odd Indian casinos running 15,000 illegal slot machines, a political war erupted. Card clubs griped that the tribes were muscling in on their business. A judge declared the slots illegal, but the tribes refused to turn them off. Federal prosecutors began investigating whether to remove the machines. The tribes said they wanted to sign a compact, but then-Governor Pete Wilson—who had no great love of gambling or Indians—refused to negotiate with tribes operating slots. Finally, in early 1998, Wilson hammered out a very restrictive compact with a handful of nongaming tribes. The "Pala Compact" limited California to 19,900 machines, a small fraction of what the gambling tribes wanted.

By now, most of the gambling tribes had shed their outside partners. They had learned to run the casinos themselves. They had hired publicists and fancy lawyers. They were, in other words, players, and they were not about to roll over while Wilson deprived them of their newfound status. "We cannot stand by and be silent while the modern-day economic equivalent of our buffalo is slaughtered," thundered one tribal leader. And so they decided, at long last, to enter politics.

In 1998, the big gaming tribes drafted Proposition 5, a ballot initiative to allow them to offer Vegas-style gambling. Las Vegas—which stood to lose $400 million a year if Indian gambling spread—poured more than $25 million into anti-Prop 5 ads and organizing. But the tribes rose to the challenge. They saw Vegas's $25 million and raised it, spending $68 million on their Prop 5 campaign—by far a record for a single ballot initiative. The San Manuel Band alone gave $25.5 million—$300,000 for *each* of its 85 members. The Indians' ads were brilliant: Mark Macarro, the tribal chairman for the Pechanga Band, gently told viewers that Prop 5 would give California Indians a long-overdue chance to pull themselves out of poverty. The tribes argued that California deserved the gambling jobs Nevada was taking. They emphasized that zillionaire Nevada casino owners, not Californians, were bankrolling Prop 5's opposition. Tribes also courted lawmakers: according to California's Common Cause, tribes donated more than $7 million to legislative and statewide candidates in 1998, dwarfing their horse-racing and card-club rivals. (Two of the three largest campaign contributors in the 1998 cycle were Indian tribes.) Democratic gubernatorial candidate Gray Davis, who expressed sympathy for the Indians' cause, received more than $650,000 in tribal contributions in 1998. The tribes also spent nearly $2 million on lobbying. Prop 5 won with 63 percent of the vote. Davis was elected governor, and both legislative houses filled with members sympathetic to the tribes.

But the victory seemed short-lived. In August 1999, following a lawsuit by Nevada casinos, the state Supreme Court threw out Prop 5, arguing that the law did not trump California's constitutional ban on Nevada-style gambling. Again, prosecutors began talking about closing illegal Indian casinos. But now the tribes had an ally in the governor's office. Davis, arguing that IGRA obliged him to negotiate a compact in good faith, called the gambling franchise a fair reparation for Indian suffering. "For too long California's Indians have been denied the respect and dignity they deserve," he said. "That chapter in our history ends today." In the three weeks after the Supreme Court decision, Davis and the legislature hastily wrote a compact with most of California's tribes—an agreement that permitted more slot machines with less regulation than Wilson's compact had. They also drafted a constitutional amendment, Prop 1A, that would remove the ban on Nevada-style gambling once and for all. The legislature jammed the compact through, essentially without public hearings, and passed it overwhelmingly in the last hours of the legislative session. They also placed Prop 1A on the March 7 ballot.

Defeated once, the Nevada casinos have given up. (In fact, a few Nevada companies have even switched sides and struck deals to build casinos for California tribes.) The minimal opposition to Prop 1A, spearheaded by the tiny grassroots group Stand Up for California, has raised $44,000—no match for the $21 million the tribes are spending to get it passed. "This represents their economic survival," says Waltona Manion, spokesperson for the Indians' Prop 1A campaign. "They will do whatever it takes to protect their children and grandchildren." After three years, two governors, two initiatives, and nearly $100 million, the tribes will have their legal gambling.

INDEED, THE REAL question about Prop 1A is not whether it will pass but what it will do to the state. Davis insists that Prop 1A authorizes a "modest expansion" of gambling that will merely double the number of slot machines to about 40,000. But the compact's formula for determining the maximum number of

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machines is ludicrously complex. Many who have analyzed it believe it will allow California tribes to more than quintuple the current number of slots to well over 100,000—three times more than any other state except Nevada. Critics worry that Prop 1A will turn California into another Vegas. They fear that nonrecognized tribes, of which there are more than 40 in California, will seek federal status and petition for reservation land in cities and along superhighways so they can build neon palaces. McCarthy estimates that the number of problem gamblers in California could double to 1.4 million—a massive social burden that will fall on the state, not on the tribes.

A gambling surge could also inflame tensions over sovereignty. Because tribes govern themselves, they can take liberties private gambling operations can't. Each tribal council charters its own gaming commission. At Rumsey, Paula Lorenzo, as head of the tribal government, supervises the gaming commissioners. The gaming commissioners, in turn, are supposed to regulate the casino that Lorenzo runs. (She calls them "my gaming commissioners," which begins to suggest the conflict of interest.) The state has no authority to prevent shady behavior: nothing stops tribal casinos from, say, using low-payout machines or refusing to pay jackpots. Tribes conduct their own environmental regulation of tribal land. Tribes hoping to attach golf courses and hotels to their casinos are already battling with neighbors over water rights. The Indian casinos permit 18-year-olds to gamble, though teenagers can't do so anywhere else in the state. Indian casinos can employ felons, and at least two California tribes have stirred controversy by making deals with mob families.

These are legitimate causes for concern—but only to a point. Very few of the unrecognized tribes are likely to win federal recognition. The real limit on slots is less the compact's formula than the market. Howard Dickstein notes that California has had an essentially open market for gambling for a decade, yet has only 20,000 slot machines. Even if the law will bear 100,000 slots, the market won't. Many tribes are too poorly located to offer gambling, and even those in decent locations can't attract enough business to warrant 2,000 machines, the maximum number allowed. Rumsey, for example, will max out at 600 machines, Dickstein predicts. It's an hour from Sacramento and two hours from San Francisco—too far to generate megacasino business. Only a half-dozen tribes will operate 2,000-machine casinos, and the entire state will probably settle at 50,000 machines and about 50 casinos.

BESIDES, DAVIS'S COMPACT will regulate the tribes more strictly than compacts elsewhere. Tribes aren't legally obliged to pay taxes, for example, but Davis convinced them to kick back a small percentage of their slot revenue to the state. And, though they occasionally feud over water rights and traffic, most tribes maintain cordial relationships with surrounding communities. The casinos, after all, create thousands of jobs, almost all of which go to non-Indians. This isn't to say the Cadillacs and satellite dishes materializing on reservations don't enrage some Californians. But they shouldn't resent the Indians' success; they should welcome it. Gambling tribes have slashed sky-high welfare and unemployment rates to zero. Thanks to slots, some tribes have electricity and potable water for the first time. Manion recalls meeting one elderly Indian woman who used her gambling proceeds to buy a bed, her first.

If California Indian gambling has a real drawback, it's that it doesn't spread its wealth broadly enough. About 300,000 Californians identify themselves as Indian. Of those, 32,000 are enrolled in federally recognized California tribes, the groups that can offer gambling. Of those, less than a third belong to the 40-odd tribes that offer gambling. And even fewer Indians belong to the tribes that are making the huge gambling profits. The most successful tribes are often the teeniest: Rumsey has 42 members, San Manuel has 85, Cabazon has 25, Twenty-nine Palms has 16. The vast majority of California Indians are pocketing nothing from gambling.

The gambling tribes are making token efforts to share the wealth. Under the compact, gambling tribes dedicate a small cut of their slot profits to a revenue-sharing fund. The nongambling tribes will split it equally, up to $1.1 million per tribe per year. This would be a windfall for the lone Sheep Ranch Indian, but it will hardly dent the poverty of larger nongambling tribes. Indians from unrecognized tribes won't benefit at all.

ONCE THE INDIANS have overwhelmed the opponents of Prop 1A, they will likely dispense with other rivals: the card-club and horse-racing industries. Both are already suffering. The tribal casinos can offer every game the card clubs do, plus slots, blackjack, and video poker. Tribes can permit smoking and under-21 gamblers, and they don't have to pay taxes. It's true that the card clubs have better geography—many are within Los Angeles County—but that's not enough to offset the other disadvantages. At the flagship card club, the Commerce Casino, revenues fell from $110 million in 1997 to $100 million last year.

Haig Kelegian, Bicycle Club owner and California Gaming Association president, expects card clubs to start going belly-up in two years if the state doesn't intervene. The racetracks want permission to offer at-home horse wagering; the card clubs want to offer the "banked" games, notably blackjack, now legal only in Indian casinos. But the prospects for both proposals seem bleak, given that the Indians—who are determined to keep their gambling franchise exclusive—now spend five times as much on politics as the other gambling interests do. Davis, who last year vetoed a bill to allow banked games, says he won't even meet with the card clubs until after March 7. "It's totally unfair and un-American," complains Kelegian. "The card-club industry is being forced out of business because the governor wants to satisfy 32,000 Indians." That's basically true: the gambling tribes are even less interested in helping other gambling interests than they are in helping nongambling tribes. But that's just another sign that California's long-suffering Indians have really made it: they have learned to behave just like any other special interest. ■

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Campaign Journal

Drag Race

By MICHELLE COTTLE

NEW YORK

IT WAS JUST past noon, eight days before the New York primary, and Jacques DeGraff already looked exhausted. He wasn't rumpled, exactly: dressed in an impeccable black-and-cream suit, cream handkerchief jutting crisply from his pocket, DeGraff looked like the sort of man who is never rumpled. But the weariness in his eyes and manner was unmistakable. And who could blame him? As deputy national campaign director and New York head of Bill Bradley's presidential bid, DeGraff was tasked with rallying support for a dying candidacy in a state not exactly renowned for its political compassion.

Just a few months ago, the New York primary struck fear into the hearts of Team Gore. A former Knicks star and senator from neighboring New Jersey, Bradley enjoyed a home-court advantage in the Empire State—complete with the endorsement of New York's legendary retiring senator, Daniel Patrick Moynihan. As recently as October, Bradley was running even with Gore in the polls.

Now, seated in his tiny, windowless office in the campaign's New York headquarters—located directly behind Madison Square Garden—DeGraff found himself at the head of a campaign that seemed, if possible, to have achieved negative momentum. (I could actually feel my pulse slowing as I entered the earnestly shabby suite of offices.) Bradley was down some 25 points in statewide polls, and the New York troops had begun to lose faith. Making matters worse, Bradley was spending his days in Washington state, throwing all his energy into its February 29 primary (in which zero delegates were at stake)—a move that wasn't sitting well with some of the senator's New York supporters. "If you find out why they are there, please let me know," Bradley man and former New York City Mayor Ed Koch groused to *The New York Times*.

The stated logic behind Bradley's Washington effort was that a strong showing there would give him buzz going into the Super Tuesday primaries the following week. The senator's Washington blitzkrieg generated buzz, all right: Long before the polls closed—sealing Bradley's excruciating 31-point trouncing by Gore—rumors were flying that the senator was poised to drop out of the race at any moment.

But, even before the Washington drubbing, DeGraff sounded like a defeated man. "It does require an effort" to keep the volunteers energized, he acknowledged in a heavy, gravelly voice. "People can read the polls. They see things. There are people for whom an insurgency is a daunting effort." In many minds, he admitted, "the McCain campaign has now become *the* insurgency. And so our supporters need to see evidence that there is still a campaign, still a viable candidacy." Listening to the sagging DeGraff and to other Bradley supporters, it wasn't hard to see why John McCain's crusade, not Bradley's, had emerged as *the* insurgency. Crusades for reform, after all, are supposed to be fun. In fact, they have to be so as not to feel preachy. McCain has, by all accounts, done a marvelous job of keeping the fun factor high. Bradley, on the other hand, has failed spectacularly.

"PARTICULARLY IF YOU'RE an insurgent candidate, you have to strike an emotional chord with voters on something that they care deeply about, and then ram that home," explained Len Lenihan, co-chair of the Bradley campaign in Erie County. "What McCain has brought to the fore is the emotional drive of his campaign—which gets more emotional by the day." Bradley's style, by contrast, "doesn't lend itself to emotional appeals. He really believes in a rational discussion of the issues." But when you have a primary season that ends in early March, said Lenihan, "there's not time for a rational discussion." Said another devout but discouraged Bradley supporter, "There's something about his presentation that's not getting across to the masses. He's too intellectual; he doesn't go for the gut."

But, even as they criticized, Bradley's supporters seemed almost proud of the candidate's inability to connect with voters—as if their man's relentlessly plodding, pedagogical style proved his commitment to substance over flash. "People don't look at this race in terms of issues or values or what a candidate stands for," complained Matt Bardin, a Bradley fan and aspiring screenwriter from the Upper West Side. Instead, he said, his voice sharp with contempt, "they discuss it like they're handicapping a horse race," rambling on about how Bradley lacks charisma or personality. "When they come at me with some reason that has nothing to do with the issues—talking about the need to be media savvy or something like that," said Bardin, "I feel like the country's going to hell in a handbasket."

Last October, the 35-year-old Bardin contacted the Bradley campaign about organizing campaign events for well-educated, upper-middle-class urban professionals like himself. He and a handful of friends launched a series of cocktail parties and happy hours at which hip young New Yorkers could come together to swap thoughts about the candidate and his policy positions. "I wouldn't want to feel, come next November, that I had done nothing," he said. And, although increasingly frustrated by the general public's inability to see what he sees in Bradley—"If people out there understood what Bill Bradley stands for, he would win in a landslide"—Bardin remained resolutely behind his guy even at this dark hour. "I just can't understand people who would get out and vote for Al Gore," he sighed. "I agree Bradley's chances are slim—he's facing double-digit deficits. But you never know. I'll do whatever I can, because I believe in him and what he stands for."

Thus, there exists a kind of tragic nobility in the hopelessness of Bradley's campaign. (How could the unenlightened, unwashed masses possibly understand?) Every loss is further proof of the candidate's moral fortitude. And even strategic mistakes—such as the campaign's ability to spend well over $1 million in Iowa to achieve a 28-point loss—become a

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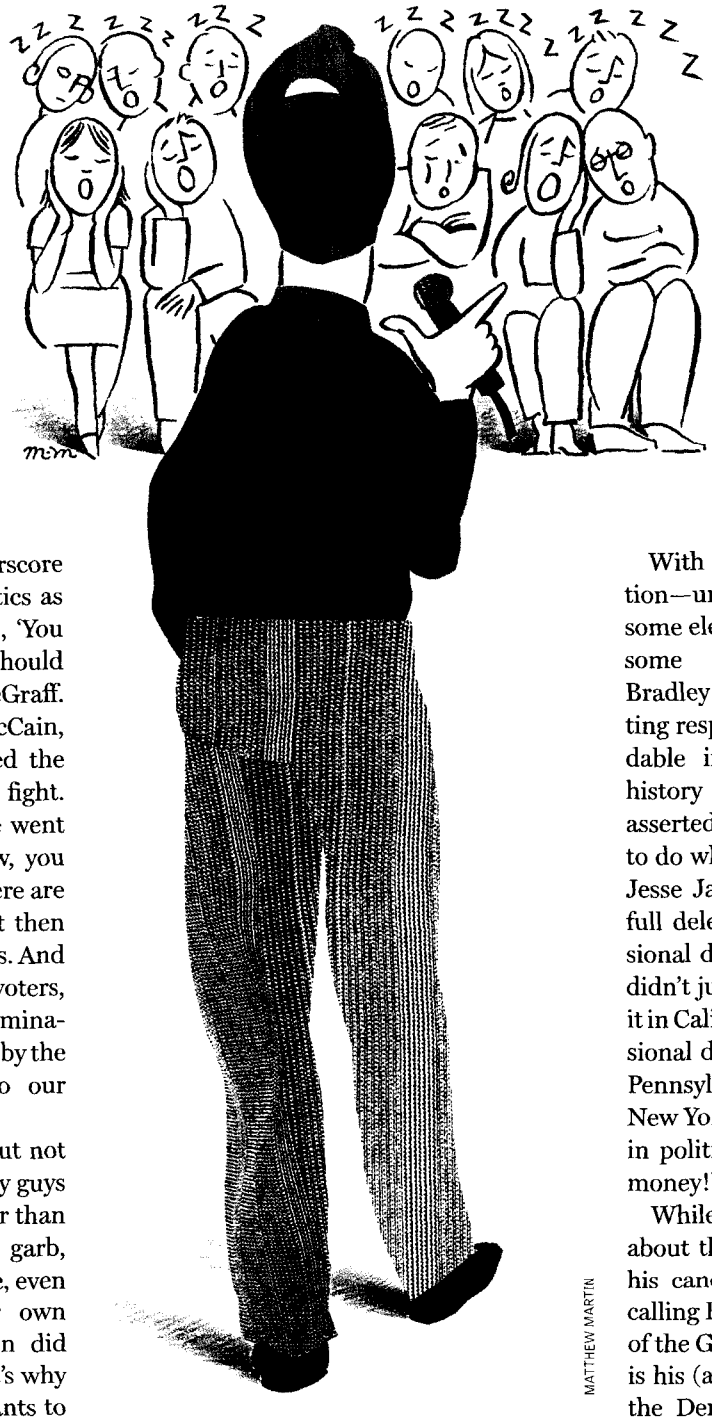

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point of pride, since they underscore Bradley's refusal to play "politics as usual." "Everybody advised us, 'You shouldn't go to Iowa' or 'You should cut back on Iowa,'" said DeGraff. "But we're not like John McCain, who skipped Iowa and picked the places where [he wanted to] fight. What Bill Bradley did was he went and played by the rules. Now, you can second-guess that, and there are those who already are.... But then that's playing by your own rules. And I think, out of respect for the voters, this campaign made its determination that we were going to play by the rules, whether it worked to our advantage or not."

Such talk is high-minded but not terribly appealing. The Bradley guys messed up in Iowa, and, rather than cloaking their loss in moral garb, they should say so with a smile, even crack a few jokes at their own expense. That's what McCain did after South Carolina, and that's why he's the reformer everyone wants to hang out with. Since they basically accuse everyone involved in politics of being corrupt, reformist campaigns are always in danger of seeming pious and aloof. McCain has found a way to transform this inherent moralizing into a rowdy assault on the manipulative, elitist, self-serving powers that be—an "us versus them" scenario that Americans can get fired up about. By constantly joking around, often taking shots at himself, he also shows that he's with his supporters, not above them. "Come join the fight to screw the establishment!" could well be maverick McCain's rallying cry. Professor Bradley, conversely, has tried to lecture his way to victory, confident that voters would ultimately recognize the innate reason and wisdom and virtue of his plans for their lives. This is no way to run an insurgency—first, it's elitist; worse, it's boring.

With victory now out of the question—unless Gore falls victim to some eleventh-hour scandal or gruesome industrial accident—the Bradley campaign is now about getting respect. "This is the most formidable insurgent candidacy in the history of the Democratic Party," asserted DeGraff. "We have been able to do what Ted Kennedy, Gary Hart, Jesse Jackson could not do: field a full delegate slate in every congressional district in New York. And we didn't just do it in New York. We did it in California—all fifty-two congressional districts. We did it in Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland, and New York. No one has ever done that in political history.... And we have money!"

While DeGraff is clearly upset about the veep's personal attacks on his candidate—most notably Gore's calling Bradley a quitter and an agent of the GOP—the far greater irritation is his (assuredly accurate) sense that the Democratic establishment does not appreciate the Bradley campaign's monumental achievements. (Alas, our hero and his followers are misunderstood and mistreated even within their own party.) "This is an operation that raised $27 million, fielded delegate slates in all these places, attracted hundreds if not thousands of new people to the democratic process in a significant way," DeGraff said. "Anybody in any situation like this wants to be appreciated and wants to be considered and heard. And I think that there's enough evidence on the table at this time that that would not occur—and that would give people pause."

Unless the Gore campaign starts treating the Bradley folk with greater respect, warned DeGraff, the vice president could find himself with a heap of trouble on his hands even after Bradley drops out. "I think Bill Bradley will do the right thing" and make peace, he said. But, as for Bradley

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supporters, "some of this stuff really smarts, and I consider it to be out-of-bounds.... I don't know that everybody will be able to do a 'Hip-hip-hooray, let's go.' The healing is not something I take for granted at this point."

It's safe to assume that the vice president is not sitting up nights fretting that a coterie of disgruntled Bradley supporters will convince hordes of voters to "sit on their hands," as DeGraff put it, come Election Day. But it's just possible that a token show of respect from the Gore campaign could impel Bradley to leave the race sooner rather than later. After all, it matters a great deal to Bradley's campaign to have their good intentions and their high ideals acknowledged. It's more important than creating excitement, it's more important than connecting with voters, and it's more important even than winning. Which, as it turns out, is a good thing. ■

Is John McCain trying to lose?

Race Against Himself

By David Grann

Like the Republican party, the reporters on the Straight Talk Express are currently divided into two camps—only their disagreement centers not on ideology but on a more immediate concern: Who has unearthed the most peculiar John McCain moment? The first camp says it happened right after the New Hampshire primary, when the senator was holed up in his eighth-floor hotel room watching the returns on CNN with his family and friends. It was shortly after 7 p.m., and the network had finally declared McCain the victor by a 19-point landslide. The senator's children began jumping up and down under a picture of former President George Bush, which hung on the wall in the presidential suite. McCain's wife, Cindy, put her hand over her mouth and cried. And that's when it occurred. While everyone else was celebrating, McCain just stood there, his body wound tight as a coil, his face expressionless—a perfect portrait of despair. His wife embraced him, saying, "It really happened." But McCain still didn't smile. "It was the oddest thing," remembers one of the reporters in the room. "He looked as if he were watching his own funeral."

On the Straight Talk Express, that scene in the New Hampshire hotel room has become renowned. ("Everyone keeps asking me why I wasn't more excited," McCain said when I inquired about it.) But another group of reporters says something even weirder happened two weeks later. According to them, the most bizarre McCain moment occurred not at the height of his campaign but at its nadir, when the senator was being routed in South Carolina. As the returns filtered in—showing McCain trailing by eleven points—his aides headed for the bar, where they drank and smoked cigarettes, too depressed to spin more than sporadically. Cindy McCain began to cry once again, only this time in despair. "How could they believe all that about you?" she asked, as exit polls showed how effective George W. Bush's attacks had been.

But, as it became clear that McCain had lost the primary he had only days earlier declared "make or break"—in part because he refused to "win in the worst way," as he later put it—he seemed almost joyful. "Come on, guys," he said as he boarded the plane to Michigan, squeezing aides' arms and smiling. The next morning he seemed more upbeat than he had in days. On the Straight Talk Express he lustily attacked Bush—"If he's a reformer, I'm an astronaut"—and joked with reporters. He said he had renamed his once-lucky shoes "unlucky" and vowed that even if he lost he would do so nobly. "You don't have to win every skirmish to win ... a crusade," he said. Afterward one reporter quipped: "I don't want to spout psychobabble, but I think he was happier when he lost."

In fact, the moments the journalists found so strange were not strange at all; they were a glimpse of the true John McCain, the one often masked by his candor. And they reveal the central dilemma of his campaign, a dilemma less ideological or strategic than psychological. McCain wants to win, but he often seems more comfortable losing. Throughout his adult life, first in the military and then in politics, he has sought out hopeless causes, championed them brilliantly, and enhanced his stature through their defeat. And in this campaign the pattern has reasserted itself: at critical moments he has opted for glorious failure rather than dishonorable success. Now, as the campaign enters its final days, he may no longer be able to rescue his candidacy from his crusade.

In the U.S. Naval Academy, McCain used to instinctively ally himself with lost causes. He endlessly defended hapless plebes, as Navy freshmen are called, from the upperclassmen—even when it put his own standing at risk. In one legendary incident, recounted by Robert Timberg in *The Nightingale's Song,* McCain came to the rescue of a Filipino steward in the mess hall. As an upperclassman dressed the steward down for no reason, McCain, although outranked, rose from his table and said, "Hey, mister, why don't you pick on someone your own size?"

Such insubordination made McCain the bane of his superior officers; he racked up so many demerits he was nearly expelled. Yet in the process he captivated his classmates' imagination—a kind of lone figure, collar turned up, cigarette dangling from his mouth, resisting the establishment.

After graduation, McCain became an icon not just to his classmates but to his country. Shot down over Hanoi, he was imprisoned and tortured for nearly six years. Unlike Dwight D. Eisenhower or Ulysses S. Grant, he did not take a hill or sink a ship. Instead, he became a new kind of hero. He "had to learn to suffer," says Wes Schierman, a fellow POW who recently showed up at a McCain rally in Washington state. "He couldn't really win any battles, but he was a good resister, an honorable one." He emerged from the ashes of the country's greatest lost cause as one of its only symbols of pride.

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In the Senate, perhaps out of political calculation, perhaps out of instinct, McCain again embraced lost causes that burnished his image. He fought futilely for campaign finance and tobacco reform—issues that he framed in bright lines of right and wrong. "John is a great romantic," says Mike Murphy, one of McCain's strategists. "It is always him and a small band of senators or warriors up against the world."

But, because McCain saw the world in Manichaean terms, he resisted compromise—and often viewed those who did not with contempt. His demonization of his foes and his refusal to accept backroom deals made him, in the words of one GOP Senate aide, "the only senator who became a legend by losing."

IT IS HARDLY surprising, then, that when McCain set out to run for president he conceived of it from the beginning as a moral mission. In a memo, his top strategist, John Weaver, listed the 15 things he had to do. Number 15: "Be big, establish the crusade."

When I met up with McCain a year ago in South Carolina, when the Straight Talk Express was nothing more than a van with two backseats and three reporters, he said he wanted to take the government back from the "evil" forces in Washington. He promised to be the un-Clinton, to say and do what was right even if it meant losing. Over his aides' initial objections, he insisted on championing campaign finance reform, even though conventional wisdom held it had little popular appeal. Even tactical decisions became part of a larger morality play—he spurned the Iowa caucuses not just because he didn't have the resources to compete but (in the campaign narrative) because he refused to change his position on ethanol subsidies and kowtow to the "special interests."

In the post-Clinton moment, politics as unadorned morality struck a chord. People flocked to see McCain. After he won his stunning victory in New Hampshire, he declared to a roaring crowd: "A wonderful New Hampshire campaign has come to an end, but a great national crusade has just begun."

But the statement itself suggested the impending problem. McCain seemed to believe his quest for office had reached a higher plain, a realm more noble than the usual campaign. In South Carolina, Bush pounded him with negative ads. Rather than fight back, McCain pulled his one negative spot and retreated into a kind of noble resistance, retelling the story, in almost mythical fashion, of the woman who stood up at a town-hall meeting and recounted how her child had received a phone call depicting the senator as a "cheat" and a "liar." McCain said he would never use such "political tactics" and made the conduct of his campaign, more than the issues themselves, the center of his appeal. "If we don't prevail, my friends," he said on the eve of the vote, "we know that we have taken the honorable way."

Indeed, McCain's crushing defeat in South Carolina seemed in an odd way to reduce Bush to McCain's caricature—a money-backed, mean-spirited instrument of the establishment. At his campaign rallies, McCain now played *Star Wars* music and said, as if he believed it, "I am just like Luke Skywalker fighting the Death Star." He seemed to relish being the underdog and the victim once again. "I lived in a hotel once where there were no mints on the pillow," he said. "I know how to take a punch, and I know how to fight back."

But he seemed at a loss as to how. For the next few days he appeared to vacillate between playing politics and retreating into a noble crouch. One day he authorized scathing phone messages to Michigan Catholics, attacking Bush's visit to Bob Jones University; the next day he said he would never go negative. One day he vowed he was a die-hard conservative; the next he said he would embrace "libertarians and vegetarians." "I've got to stay on the message," he said. "I can't just talk about push polls like I did in South Carolina." But he couldn't seem to fully stop himself. He talked about Pat Robertson's scurrilous phone calls in Michigan and about how Bush was coordinating Robertson's smear campaign. In a desperate fight for California—where Asian Americans represent an important voting bloc—he apologized for calling his Vietnamese captors "gooks," but then a few days later, when another reporter asked him about the remarks, he said he did not view them as a misstep and had called his captors worse.

It almost seemed that the more his campaign failed, the more his crusade succeeded. His events had the feel of spiritual revivals. In Washington state, he got off a ship in Bremerton, where 5,000 people had waited for hours in the cold and rain. As he came down the plank, a spotlight followed him and the *Rocky* theme music played. Teenage girls reached out and tried to touch him, shrieking. Men surged forward, beseeching him for his autograph. When we climbed on a bus afterward, they pushed their hands up against the windows. "It's like traveling with Mick Jagger," Cindy McCain said. At a rally in Sacramento a mother stood up and brought her child forward, saying she was horrified when she learned about Clinton's scandals. She asked McCain to touch the boy, as if to make him pure.

THE PROBLEM IS that presidential campaigns are not really about purity. They require, as Bush seemed to accept after New Hampshire, an ignobility—a tolerance, even a passion, for the unseemly fray. Crusaders who refuse to tarnish themselves end up, like Eugene McCarthy or Ralph Nader, with their dignity. But they watch from history's sidelines.

As McCain approached Super Tuesday, his aides seemed to recognize that his defeat would probably mean the defeat of their cause as well. "I think John McCain is our last chance to save the political system," said Weaver. But by then McCain had become a creature of the crusade. In an act of political courage that effectively immolated his campaign, he began to call the leadership of the very movement he needed to court—the Christian right—"evil." When I asked him on the Straight Talk Express one morning if there were any crusaders he admired from history or literature, he named Robert Jordan from *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

What happened to him? someone asked.

McCain described how Jordan had gotten trapped on the hill that the fascists were about to overrun, how he lay down on the ground and cocked his rifle, telling the woman he loved that she would always be with him. Then he waited to die.

There was a moment of silence as everyone contemplated the story. Then McCain smiled. "Hell of an ending," he said. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Divided They Stand

If there is anything more foreordained than suburban life, at least as films present it, it's those films themselves. When the first shots of a picture show us jigsawed houses and streets, when the camera ticks off the neat lawns and the school and the shopkeepers opening their shops, when all is bright and normal, we know that we are in for one more revelation of the horrors underneath. Generations ago, when a suburban film began cheerily, we knew it was going to stay cheery. Nowadays (*American Beauty*, for one recent example) we know that suburban orderliness is a portent of disorder.

One admirable element in **Judy Berlin** (Shooting Gallery), another suburban roiling, is that it begins dark, so, despite the church bells at the start, we are put in position for what follows. Eric Mendelsohn's film, set in Babylon, Long Island, is in black and white, which may be because of economy but nonetheless absolutely fits. Especially because this is the day of solar eclipse. In the center of the story, or stories, is a school principal (Bob Dishy) who has a frustrated love for one of his teachers (Barbara Barrie) and has a wife hovering near nervous breakdown (Madeline Kahn—her last appearance, I guess) and a son of thirty-two (Aaron Harnick) utterly disaffected with life. The teacher has a daughter of thirty-two (Edie Falco). She is the title character, who is just about to leave for Hollywood. To complete the menu, there is an aging ex-teacher (Bette Henritze) who has Alzheimer's and wanders around with just enough awareness to know that she is wandering and that she can't help it.

Mendelsohn's screenplay—this is his first picture—has one phony touch: Judy's plan to go to the coast to be a movie actress. (Since her name is the title, we expect her to be the story's catalyst; but this doesn't happen.) She is not mentally unbalanced, but this would be the only explanation for her belief that a woman of her age, amateur and pointedly plain, had a chance in Hollywood today. Her hopes are the bygone stuff of *Merton of the Movies* and *A Star Is Born*.

Mendelsohn's cinematic texture is superior to that device, even to all the naturalistic data in his script. He is not really as much interested in those stories as he is in rendering the atmosphere of this Long Island town (like the one in which he was born and raised), in trying to locate the mystery, the haunting, the ache that he feels and cannot define. At the start, in the gray dawn, he shows us the streetlights going out one by one; when we first visit the school, he pans down through the building to the basement, to the steam boilers, like an anatomist of the town's body. When the principal's wife fears that her husband has left her, she wanders through the streets during the (handily) symbolic eclipse, speaking to herself, and she walks past an elderly neighbor who is just standing silently in the middle of the street contemplating the sky. Moments like these, reminders though they are of Antonioni and Fellini, are more gripping than the pat wistfulness of the stories.

The acting, for the most part, is more of a cultural declaration than was presumably intended. Dishy and Kahn and Barrie and Falco are skilled at TV miniaturism: the small gestures, the tentative yet multiple inflections, the half-glances that have evolved as techniques for a screen smaller than the one on which we see them here. Large-scale performing would of course be ludicrous; Henritze is an example of how to act, really act, in the right scale. Most of these actors continually imply a reliance on camera and mike to fulfill what they are sketching. Among them only Harnick is affecting, but this is possibly because the young man he plays, lapped in listlessness, is served sufficiently by TV style.

Speaking of non-acting, here is Giovanni Ribisi, who has the leading role in **Boiler Room** (New Line). Unlike Mendelsohn's film, here the boiler room is figurative. This picture is about killer stockbrokers, telephone peddlers of dubious stocks, whose imperative is "ABC" (Always Be Closing) and whose office boils with energy—swindling so frenetic that the frenzy verges on the orgasmic, giving the swindler such pleasure that the fact of swindling is submerged. And in the middle of all this, there is Ribisi, pallid, weak-voiced, dim-featured, designed by nature as a minor person yet playing a trainee swindler about whom his superiors feel hopeful. Why? The weakest moments in this strenuous picture are the ones in which Ribisi is on the phone trying to make good at ABC. One customer is shown to believe him. Why?

The Ribisi mystery begins even earlier. At the start he is a college dropout who is running a casino in a plain Queens house, a Las Vegas high-roller in embryo. Credibility groans. Two of the stock-peddlers come in to play, spot him, and recruit him. Credibility wilts. Then he goes to work in the brokerage—all the staff seem to be under thirty—and his torpor is underlined by the vitality of everyone around him, especially the superiors who think he can make the grade. Again—why?

Ribisi is evidently benefiting from the very organism of the film medium. Sometimes viewers can feel that if an actor is actually in a role, photographed, placed up there on the screen, he must be good, or at least acceptable, simply because he is there. His mere presence becomes his verification. This is the producers' hope, I guess, with Ribisi.

Boiler Room, too, is a first film, written and directed by Ben Younger, who tries to obviate comparisons with Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* (1987) by quoting Stone's film. It's a sort of bible for these Young Turks: they watch a tape of it in the evenings and know it by heart. (Which makes their acceptance of Ribisi even stranger.) Younger also displays knowledge of David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*; one sequence in which a hooked sucker wants his money back is, let's say, an homage to Mamet. And then there are the scenes between Ribisi and his father (a judge) to whom the son is closely bound though there's a great gulf between them. Arthur Miller may be amused.

As director, Younger keeps his film bouncing along but not enough to compensate for its familiarity. And it splits—between the bustle of most of the brokers and the jejune Ribisi.

An Italian film called **Not of This World** (Intra) is, in its own way, as schizoid as the two above. The screenplay by Giuseppe Piccioni and Gualtiero Rosella is slush; but Piccioni's directing is sophisticated, smart, sharp.

A young Milanese nun, who has not yet taken her final vows, is walking through a park one day when a jogger suddenly deposits in her arms a newborn baby that

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he has just found. (After this inauspicious start, there's a Piccioni touch: as the jogger jogs away, he puffs on a cigarette.) A tag on the baby's blanket leads the nun to a dry-cleaning shop and its bachelor owner. Matters develop between them, always proper enough, with the infant as their link. It's the sort of story we watch because it is not aggressively unwatchable and because we have some curiosity about how the authors will get out of it.

But the film is better than its story. First, Margherita Buy, as the nun, and Silvio Orlando, as the cleaner, play for truth, not for treacle. Both of them make human beings out of what could easily have been heartthrob puppets. Second, Piccioni, who surely had something to do with the good acting, composes shots acutely, nudges gently, and intersperses odd touches—photographs of groups, like the dry-cleaning staff, that wryly kid the movieness of the movie. All these components suggest that, with scripts as unsoppy as his directing, Piccioni might make good comedies. ■

The End of Beauty

By ADAM KIRSCH

Swarm
by Jorie Graham

(Ecco, 114 pp., $23)

I.

AN ADMIRER ONCE approached T.S. Eliot with a question about "Ash Wednesday," perhaps his most obscure poem: "What did you mean when you wrote 'Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree'?" The poet replied: "I meant, 'Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree.'" This is the expected response, the only possible response. If poetry really is the best words in the best order, then no paraphrase or explication of a line can ever be as accurate as the line itself. And yet it is impossible to deny that Eliot's line is strange—so strange, in fact, that it asks us to ask what it means.

The line announces itself as allegorical. Thinking of the leopard, the wolf, and the lion that accost Dante at the beginning of the *Inferno*, we are convinced that Eliot's three leopards have some symbolic meaning; and, following Dante, it is natural to take the leopards as symbols of bodily appetites, violent lusts, which have destroyed the poet ("fed to satiety/ On my legs my heart my liver"). But unlike Dante's symbols—unlike the elaborate allegory at the end of the *Purgatorio*, where the "twenty-four old men, crowned with lilies" are quite specifically the twenty-four books of the Old Testament—Eliot's allegory is missing its key. We cannot "read" the symbol completely.

It is this experience of meaning withheld that, as much as anything, signals that we are reading a Modernist poem. Our encounter with such poetry can be described in two ways, the theoretical and the phenomenal. The theoretical level of communication proceeds directly from poet to reader over the head of the poem. On this level, the opacity of the symbol is itself a statement about the limits of communicability; it seems to instruct that language itself fails before the most important information, that the profoundest truths can only be gestured at. But it is crucial to remember that this theoretical statement is a secondary experience of the poem. It comes after the phenomenal experience that we have immediately when we read the words. First and foremost, we respond to the poem's sound and its literal meaning. These are the bedrock of any poem, and they must be secure and available if the theoretical superstructure is to hold. Only if the poem is linguistically and formally enticing will a reader—that is, a reader who does not have a professional interest in understanding poetry—devote the time necessary to embark on the toil of theory.

It is at the phenomenal level that we read a poem. At the theoretical level, by contrast, we "do a reading" of a poem, in

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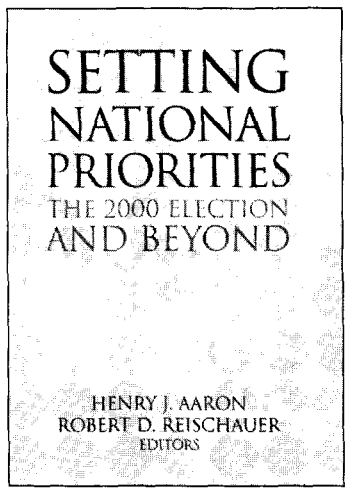

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the academic phrase. To read is to allow the poem to shine out as what it is, to take in what it presents. To "do a reading" is to apply to the poem a technique whose product hovers above or alongside the poem itself as a ghostly presence.

The theoretical approach to poetry, moreover, is especially common in the discussion of new poetry. New poetry is usually considered at a level of generality so far removed from the poems themselves that—as is evidenced by the jacket copy and blurbs on most books—virtually any description of a poet could be applied to any other poet. To say that a poet writes "about desire," "about the body," "about knowledge," tells us literally nothing about him or her: Shakespeare, Keats, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Eliot himself all write "about desire." But such an assignment of themes provides a rough-and-ready way to categorize, and to direct our reading of, unfamiliar poetry. It promotes not the language, but the meaning; and even more, the elusive meaning.

This process has been exceptionally visible in the career of Jorie Graham, who is among the most difficult writers, in any genre, in contemporary American literature. She has been received with virtually unanimous enthusiasm, even though hardly enough calendar time has passed for her poems to be fully understood by most readers. The reason, I think, is that Graham writes about important and difficult subjects that most poets do not approach. Her poems are not mired in personal history and group identity; they treat nothing less than epistemology and metaphysics. And this makes them well suited to critics, who instinctively ask what a poem is about rather than what it is. Indeed, the key to understanding Graham's poetry is that, more so than even most Modernist poetry, it lives and breathes on the level of theory, with a corresponding diminishment of its phenomenal presence. Graham's verse demands "readings" even as it resists reading.

II.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENS when we encounter one of Graham's poems? The logic of her verse is not just allegorical; it is positively algebraic. In allegory, the meaning of a symbol may not be immediately evident, but the symbol must have some more or less natural relation to what it symbolizes. To take the Dantean example: men are not books of the Bible, but old men are commonly thought to be wise, to be teachers of wisdom, and the books of the Bible also teach wisdom. In algebra, by contrast, the signifier is totally arbitrary; it is an "x," and so it quite literally "stands in" for something else, in that it must be removed for the equation to be solved. When, in reading Graham, we find lines such as these:

> opening and shutting to feel them rub
> against each other in here now
> (only in here),
> the shut dark, the open dark—
> and in between the _____ where the
> suspicion of meaning
> begins....

or lines such as these:

> I swear to you this begins with that girl
> on a day after sudden rain
> and then out of nowhere sun (as if
> to expose the *what* of the hills—
> the white glare of x, the scathing splendor
> of y,
> the wailing interminable _____ ?)....

we know that we are being instructed to read algebraically, to solve the poem for "x" and "y" and "_____."

The entire organization of Graham's poetry on every level—theme, narrative, syntax, metaphor, titles, footnotes—is also algebraic. At every level, something crucial is left out, which the reader is meant to find and put back in—or, just as significantly, to be unable to find, a failure which itself becomes part of the poem's theoretical freight. To understand what is involved in the attempt to read Graham, consider a characteristic passage. This is the beginning of "The Guardian Angel of Point-of-View," from *The Errancy*, which appeared in 1997:

> A mourning dove. And again what you
> suffer
> seems, ah, as if yet unlived through.
> The bird keeps calling. You are in the
> middle
> of the call.
> There is thirsting in this work.
> I must uphold — faultless — each outline
> — up —
> each sloughing-off of meaning
> into form. Ah...the bird keeps calling.
> *Behold* — says my headless swording-in
> — *this.*
> A gibbering, then a surprising fastness,
> then the opulence of
> the stilled thing, seen.
> There is a thirsting for ever greater
> aperture,
> for ever more refined
> beginning. Desire for a stillness that truly
> un-
> folds. Thirst,
> because I'm never wholly *in* creation,
> unlike these I am compelled to witness,
> there, everywhere....
> Oh to taste the limits of the single
> aperture.
> To have that one beam burn from one's
> head —
> the snapping of a retina — no errancy —
> and starched, voracious — (plunder
> without narration) —
> this view the very drink for whom these
> drinkers are
> created....

It is evident that one cannot read this poem as one usually reads a poem, with confidence that the poet will tell us more or less what she is talking about. We can measure the magnitude of the deprivation if we compare Graham's poem to another English poem that begins with a birdcall:

> My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness
> pains
> My sense, as though of hemlock I had
> drunk,
> Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
> One moment past, and Lethe-wards
> had sunk:
> 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
> But being too happy in thy happiness—
> That thou, light-winged Dryad of the
> trees,
> In some melodious plot
> Of beechen green, and shadows
> numberless,
> Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

Here Keats presents us with two things—himself and a nightingale—in a clear, though rich, relation: the poet is listening to the bird singing, and is having an emotion in reaction to that song. The nightingale is not named in this stanza, but the title tells us what is being addressed, healing the one potential gap in our knowledge.

In "The Guardian Angel of Point-of-View," Graham, too, writes about hearing a bird singing, and her reaction to it. But her title says nothing about a bird; she directs us to look for an angel, which will not be found in any literal sense. And her rapid, choppy style does not pause to set the scene. Basic information is given in the wrong order, or not at all. We are forced to fill in the gaps, to provide paraphrases and references—in short, to interpret, to "do a reading"—from the very beginning.

At first there is just a bird, and no song; but the reader, familiar with a tradition of bird poems from Keats through Arnold, Hardy, and Frost, tacitly "reads" the song into the bare statement "A mourning dove." And the third line justifies such an interpretation, for we are told that the "bird keeps calling"—that is, it was calling all along, from the beginning. Similarly, we amend the poet's syntax: Graham says "you are in the middle of

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the call," but we know that she is the one writing the poem, that it comes out of her experience, not ours, and so for "you are" we read "I am." And this emendation, too, is justified: for in the sixth line, she changes to the first-person, "I must uphold."

These are trivial corrections. We know automatically that the poet means something slightly other than what she says. Thus are we prepared to make a more substantial sort of correction, or interpretation, when we come upon the line "There is thirsting in this work." The work referred to seems to be simply listening to a bird, which would in no circumstances actually make one thirsty. We take the word "thirsting," therefore, as a clue that Graham means more than just standing-there-and-hearing. Thirsting implies activity, and one of her frequent themes is that perception is active, not passive. So we discount the actual word "thirsting," with its specific meanings, and replace it with something more general: "There is effort, or labor, in this work." Similarly, in the tenth line, Graham gives us a series of words relating to the birdsong: what she hears is first "gibbering," then "fastness," then "opulence." These words, too, are inapt. Perhaps a bird's voice could gibber, but to hold fast is a tactile image, and "opulent" is in still another category, with social implications of liberal magnificence. So we turn from the words themselves to the progression that they imply, a sort of less-more-most of perception: first a chaos of sensations, then a fixed sensation, then a richly detailed sensation.

ALREADY THE ALGEBRAIC logic of Graham's poem is evident: understanding her language is a matter of replacing arbitrary or half-appropriate words with the concepts for which they stand. And the same sort of interpretation is reprised, on a higher level, when we come to Graham's even more gnomic, and obviously philosophical, statements:

> I must uphold — faultless — each outline
> — up —
> each sloughing-off of meaning
> into form.

What can this mean in relation to hearing a bird's song, which as sound has no visual "outline"? It seems again like a statement about the active and constructive role played by the listener. Hearing is not just a matter of receiving sense-data from the outside; it requires "upholding ... each outline," that is, imposing fixity on something essentially formless. Exactly how this is connected with the description of the birdsong "sloughing-off ... meaning into form" is not clear: meaning and form seem to be equivalent in this context. It may express a semi-mystical feeling that the birdsong embodies a higher meaning, or a higher level of reality, which decays into a merely aesthetic perception of form; but this interpretation must remain tentative.

We can go on in this way and reach a certain understanding of the poem. We may conclude that the poem is "about" the desire for perfect attentiveness to nature, which is impossible to satisfy. Graham writes that she longs for "ever greater aperture"—or openness, awareness, receptivity—so that she can really take in the birdcall, hear it completely and hold it in the mind, so that this fuller act of perception might reveal a higher truth. And this "thirst" for a more complete understanding of the material world is distinctively human; it is what keeps us from being "wholly *in* creation" like the complacent animals, untroubled by what surrounds them.

But even this level of interpretation must be superseded when we come to the most opaque passages of the poem.

> Oh to taste the limits of the single
> aperture.
> To have that one beam burn from one's
> head —
> the snapping of a retina — no errancy —
> and starched, voracious — (plunder
> without narration) —
> this view the very drink for whom these

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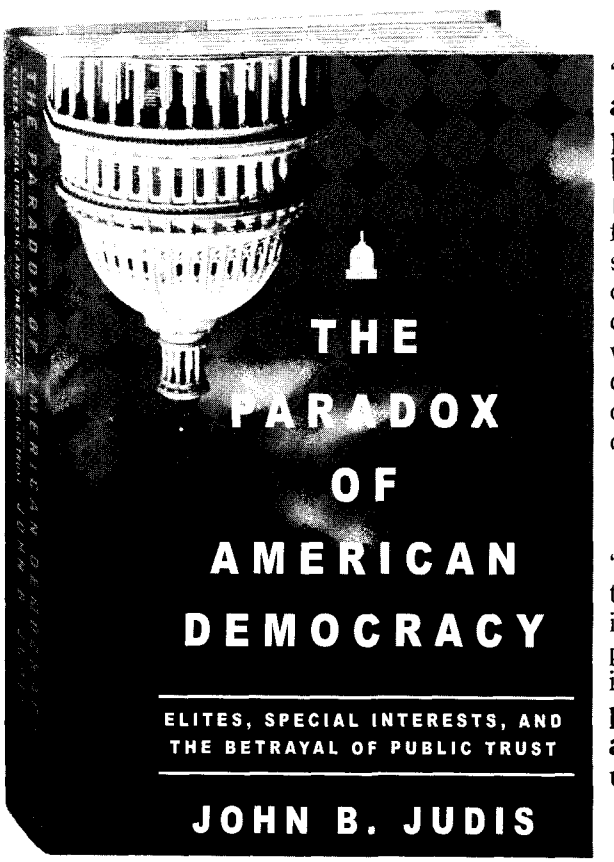

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drinkers are
created....

All these line breaks, dashes, and parentheses are, at most, interchangeable techniques of pacing, and unhelpful to the work of understanding. We are left with a baffling set of ideas, which stand in no clear relation to one another. A few lines previously, Graham has been asking for "ever greater aperture," but now she asks to "taste the limits of the single aperture." This seems to mean: to experience the largest receptivity possible for a single human's senses, that is, to be resigned to the limits. But this is followed by the wish for "having that one beam burn from one's head," which implies not the consummation but the destruction, and thereby the transcendence, of the beam (the eye-beam) of an individual's "point of view" (to look back to the title). How do these two statements stand in relation to one another? Are they the same? Or does the second intentionally go beyond the first? Or must we reread the first in terms of the second—say, by reading "taste the limits" not as "enjoy the uttermost" but "devour or consume the limits"—and, in so doing, taste them as we taste food when we consume it? And is "the snapping of a retina" a snapping open or a snapping shut? Or is it a snapping like firewood when it is burned away?

ALL THESE MUST remain "readings," provisional at best. But a clue to the proper understanding may be held in what follows. (Reading Graham often requires this retrospective rereading, not—as with many poems—for pleasure and enhancement, but for bare comprehension.) We come upon this obscure line:

this view the very drink for whom these
drinkers are
created....

The most natural interpretation of this line is: this view, the natural world, is a drink intended to satisfy human beings, the drinkers who thirst. But the grammar suggests the reverse: that humans as drinkers are created in order to serve the view, the "drink." The situation is further complicated by the use of "for whom" instead of "for which": "whom" suggests a personal antecedent, a human referent, but in this case it is referring to "the view," which is thus personalized. In what sense can it be said that humans are created for nature, and not vice versa?

Interpretation can proceed with the guidance of the word "errancy" in this passage. The title of Graham's book, remember, is *The Errancy*: clearly, a passage in which the word appears is of central importance. Errancy is an unusual word, and in her notes Graham seeks to illuminate it with a quotation, from a scholarly book, which points to the connection of "errancy" with the Latin *errare*, to wander (whence the phrase "knight errant"), and thus with "error." Errancy is a wandering and an error; or, to put it another way, errancy is the region of freedom which allows for both productive wandering, as seeking, and aimless wandering around.

TO A READER familiar with Heidegger, such a sentence has a familiar sound. Heidegger is a presence in Graham's verse; in earlier books she has used epigraphs and titles drawn from his essays. So it is not as preposterous as it might sound to look for clarification to an essay by Heidegger, one which is not specifically cited in Graham's notes. In "The Anaximander Fragment," we find the following passage:

> As it reveals itself in beings, Being withdraws. In this way, by illuminating them, Being sets beings adrift in errancy. Beings come to pass in that errancy by which they circumvent Being and establish the realm of error (in the sense of a prince's realm or the realm of poetry). Error is the space in which history unfolds. In error what happens in history bypasses what is like Being.

Without going too far afield, it is pertinent to mention that one of Heidegger's central concepts is that human consciousness, human being, serves as a clearing, or *Lichtung*, within Being—in the sense of a clearing in a forest, an open space in which things can be seen. There is a way, never definite, in which Heidegger implies that Being as a whole would be bereft or impaired if there were no human beings to provide this clearing. As a result, humans owe to Being the proper use of their clearing, which is to think about and to protect Being; this thinking is what allows Being to appear, to be disclosed. In the clearing, things are visible, "lit up," or, as the above passage says, "illuminated," by Being. But this is only possible because they are let loose into "errancy," or freedom, which also makes it possible for them to be ignored or concealed; this is how we can "bypass what is like Being." The human realm is one of error as well as of truth, of missing things as well as seeing them.

Now, equipped with this passage, we may return to Graham's problematic line. She seems to be suggesting, in a Heideggerian sense, that "these drinkers" are really created to serve nature, or Being, by "drinking it in"—that is, eagerly and carefully regarding it, taking note of it, thinking about it. This connects back with the initial image of the birdsong, which stands in for nature or Being as a whole as one of the things which must be wholly, attentively perceived: it tells us, Behold this, and take care for and of Being. And this perfect attentiveness would transcend errancy—"no errancy"—in that it would become impossible to "bypass" or to mistake what we perceive. We would become united with Being, instead of being an "aperture," or a clearing, in Being.

III.

THIS "READING," LENGTHY and digressive as it is, provides one possible interpretation of one part of one poem. So one can imagine the sheer effort of patient reading and re-reading, of solving and cross-referencing, that is necessary in reading a whole book of Graham's poetry. And even when we have done our "reading," we are left with the question: is this what she intended? It is of the nature of her poetry that it is impossible to say for sure. If we read her algebraically, it is always with the proviso that she alone—if even she—guards the complete solution, the master key that might unlock the poem.

There are two possible explanations for this withholding. The first is that Graham knows that much of what she writes is unintelligible—at least at first, and sometimes at last—and consciously works the experience of failure into the texture of the poems. We are led to this conclusion by the way in which the theoretical and phenomenal experiences of Graham's poetry chime: her poetry is often "about" the frustration of our perception by distractions and the limitations of the senses, and many facets of her work are deliberately intended to frustrate the reader.

There are her titles, which are often grand ("Short History of the West") or obscurely philosophical ("What Calls For Thinking," a Heideggerian title; "Which But for Vacancy") or just obscure ("Underneath (9)"), but almost never stand in a distinct relation to the poems that they name. And there are her intricately unhelpful notes. They do not at all elucidate; they further mystify by hinting at secret references—quotations and allusions so minor that nobody but the poet would know they were there, but whose presence adds another source of complication for the reader to unravel. There is, for instance, this note from *Swarm*:

> David Jones's work—especially in *Anathemata* and *In Parenthesis*—provided inspiration for this work in a very general sense. "Underneath (Upland)" is an

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example of his influence in terms of tone and voice.

Such a note is either fantastically scrupulous (every writer could name dozens of other writers who provided "inspiration in a very general sense"), or a private thank-you written in public. Or else it is another clue: we are led to believe that if we knew the work of Jones, we would understand Graham better. But since so many writers are similarly invoked—in the notes to *Swarm* alone, we encounter Gunnar Ekelof, Traherne, Dickinson, Anne Carson, Hölderlin, Cixous, Susan Howe, Donald Revell, Aeschylus, and Michael Palmer—to follow Graham's leads is functionally impossible. We are left with the bare sense that if we had read everything that Graham has read, we would understand her.

But this is as much as saying that if we knew what Graham thought, we could read what she writes. And this notion leads naturally to the second possible explanation for the great obscurity of Graham's work. Perhaps this obscurity is not deliberate, or it is deliberate but nonetheless a failure. In this case, Graham's poetry is obscure because it is not turned sufficiently outward to the public realm; because it refuses to leave behind the private wellsprings in which all poetry begins. With Graham, this is not, as it is with many poets, a matter of narcissism, a mere autobiographical listing of things that happened to, and resonate for, the poet. In such cases we generally comprehend what the poet is saying, but do not care. In Graham's case, however, we may care to understand, but we may be unable to; or we may not care enough to devote the effort that is required for understanding.

Very often one feels that the effort Graham expects really is too much to ask. Living inside what is clearly a rich and active mental world, Graham may forget that her readers live in other worlds—not necessarily more impoverished, just different—and that her language must be sufficiently clear, or explained with sufficient clarity, to bridge the worlds. But instead of this inner clarity, which must proceed from out of the poem itself, she gives us masses of external hints, as though she could re-create, through appropriate reference, the environment in which her own thinking takes place. There is an air of self-congratulation about the enterprise. (This tactic was most obvious in *Materialism* (1993), a book that contained dozens of long extracts from Bacon, Da Vinci, Brecht, Audubon, and miscellaneous others, as though we would know, with these texts in hand, how to read the texts that came from Graham's mind.)

IV.

In her new book, Graham's obscurity has taken a great leap forward. Her first style—the style of *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts* (1980) and *Erosion* (1983)—was already complex, but still comparatively lucid. From *The End of Beauty* (1987) to *The Errancy*, Graham becomes progressively more obscure, more allusive, and her lines take on the choppy expansiveness of "stream of consciousness." But in *Swarm* there is a reduction even more radical than the previous expansion. Instead of putting in more information, more fleeting thoughts, more images, she is now taking out virtually everything.

> I have reduced all to lower case.
>
> I have crossed out passages.
>
> I have severely trimmed and cleared.

Words, in *Swarm*, are stranded in an expanse of blanks:

> Mastery scarcity desiccation noon
>
> *
>
> Owning

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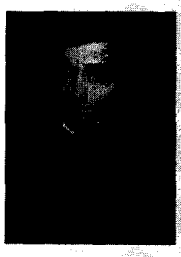

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name of
birth

*

The gods that sleep in museums....

*

(constitution ceremony)

(take that look off your face)

Reading a line such as "mastery scarcity desiccation noon" is like encountering four points in an empty space. Having learned to read Graham algebraically, we must now read her geometrically, and recall the maxim that any two points define a line. In *Swarm*, Graham is counting on the mind's inclination to compose a figure from points, to join the four words into a meaningful unity.

In fact, reading Graham's earlier work requires this same operation. The line in *Swarm* is just the radicalization of a technique that she has often used: the juxtaposition of words from different categories of discourse, with a tacit challenge to draw the connection between them. Thus, in the title poem of *The Errancy*, we find "a slippery utterly ash-free delinquency," "bloody translation," "rumorous diamond-dust," "christened bonfire," "scorched comprehension": all of them little unbalanced equations, which we must paraphrase and expand into meaning.

READING *SWARM* REQUIRES us to perform such operations in almost every line. Once again there are some guideposts, concealed and ambiguous, to help us in our interpretation. The title of the book uses the word "swarm" in a particular way, as Graham's inevitable note tells us: we are to read it not in the usual sense, as a chaotic mass, but in the technical sense of bees that "leave the hive ... and fly off together in search of a new dwelling-place," or "persons who leave the original body and go forth to found a new colony or community." For "swarm," in other words, read "colonize," "begin again."

Or, by another specialized extension of meaning, read "be born again." The epigraph of Graham's new book comes from Augustine: "To say I love you is to say I want you to be." This quotation immediately situates us in a Christian context; and, reading carefully, we find Christian images and references buried throughout the text. The book as a whole can be "read" as a record of a spiritual journey, even as a turning toward Christian belief. After years of struggling to receive or to impose an order on the world, Graham seems to resign herself to the possibility that only the traditional deity can secure meaning and order.

The citation from Augustine puts us on the lookout for Christian ideas and images. And the first poem of the book is titled "*from* The Reformation Journal"—another Christian term, implying not just the historical event but the spiritual state of resolving to start out again (to "swarm"), to resolve on amendment in the religious sense. As a "journal," it seems to record the poet's own experience of reformation. The first line of this first poem sounds, at least, like a disavowal of past error:

> The wisdom I have heretofore trusted
> was cowardice, the leaper.

Why is cowardice "the leaper"? Is it not courage that enables one to leap forward into the unknown—to make the "leap of faith"? This remains impenetrable, though one is left—as always—with the sense that a fuller "reading" might resolve what seems like a contradiction. Still, we may proceed on the assumption that Graham is writing about a spiritual turning point, a new beginning. So when we reach this line:

> A "he" referring to God may be
> capitalized
> or not.

we are confirmed in our approach. This book will apparently discuss God, though it is unsure of exactly how to address Him.

This uncertainty resounds again in the poem's last lines:

> explain asks to be followed
> explain remains to be seen

Paraphrasing these compacted lines, they seem to be a request: "Please explain to me this idea: 'asks to be followed.'" Who or what is it that asks to be followed?

> He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

Jesus demands that we follow him; and yet this is difficult, because we cannot be sure that Jesus was God. That "remains to be seen"—and it will be seen, when God himself is seen, at the Second Coming.

> For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.... For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known.

Such intimations can be found throughout Graham's book. Many poems seem to meditate on the difficulty of belief, specifically Christian belief, even though the titles and the contexts indicate that they are telling stories out of Greek mythology. There are a series of poems in the book called "Underneath": "Underneath (9)," "Underneath (Upland)," "Underneath (Calypso)." (It is typical of Graham that the first poem in this sequence to appear in the book is (9), followed at intervals by (7), (1), (2), (3), (8), (11), and (13). Perhaps the misordering and omission of some numbers is significant; perhaps we are meant to rearrange them and read them in the indicated order; perhaps not. One is left mainly with an impression of willfulness.) "Underneath (9)" is divided into four sections, named for the seasons; and this suggests that Graham is telling the myth of Persephone, who is dragged "underneath" the earth, to Hades, for one season every year. And yet, lodged within this pagan armature, we find Christian ideas:

FALL

Explain duty to remain to the end.

Duty not to run away from the good.

The good.

(Beauty is not an issue).

A wise man wants?

A master.

BEAUTY—THAT IS, the pure sense-perception which has long been a concern for Graham—is no longer the most important criterion. Now goodness is the most important; and goodness, according to the wise man, is submission to a master. The theme of submission, of obedience, again situates us in what might be a Christian context. This theme returns in a later poem, "Underneath (With Chorus)":

The pain of my eyes is piercing

I feel your presence beside me

I know your voice in the blackness

Why should I see

Oh narrow crossroad

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What is that you beg so urgently

A beginning?

A delay?

To have the god reveal to me my duty

Obedience is hard

No good life endures beyond its season

Do you know why I yield

When I have heard your reason I will know

Graham's note refers us to a translation of *Oedipus Rex*, which explains some of the imagery in the poem: "the pain of my eyes" refers to Oedipus's self-blinding, and the "crossroad" puts us in mind of the Sphinx sitting on the road before Thebes. But the final lines pursue the idea of submission, of obedience, without understanding: one must "yield" before "hearing the reason" for yielding. Oedipus did submit to Fate, but not willingly and in advance, only after being punished for his pride. To yield before "hearing the reason" is an entirely different idea. What's more, these lines put us in mind of lines from an earlier poem in the book, "Underneath (7)": "Blessed are those who have not seen/yet have/believed"—a line with clear echoes of the Beatitudes. And so the "crossroad" can be reread as a Christian symbol: the road of the cross, the way of Christ, which is "narrow" ("strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it").

There are enough Christian images in the book to dispel, or at least to dispute, the Greek-mythical structure which it announces. Or, to put it another way, it is possible to perform a "Christian reading" of *Swarm*. And in this reading we can make more sense of that strange line with which we began:

Mastery scarcity desiccation noon

The first three words propose a series—most, less, least—which the fourth seemingly fails to continue; in its place should be something like "desolation," "destruction." It seems we are being told to solve the line, with "noon" as the variable. How, then, can "noon" be interpreted as equivalent to "desolation"?

> Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

The sixth hour is noon, and the time in the Passion when Jesus's degradation—from mastery through dessiccation—is completed in abandonment. Here, it seems, we find the place where "noon" means not day but darkest night.

V.

HAVE WE FOUND Christian meaning in Graham's book, or have we put it there in a "reading"? Even though this understanding of *Swarm* seems to offer a good way to navigate much of it, there is still something disquietingly unlikely, even arbitrary, about it. It is reminiscent of those readings of *Moby-Dick* in which the whale is made to stand for various capitalized concepts. Yet Graham allows us no choice but to read exegetically, theoretically; for, unlike in *Moby-Dick*, there is no phenomenal presence, no immediately comprehensible story. Indeed, the phenomenal experience of her poetry *is* a theoretical experience. To read her is to "read" her.

Difficulty is not, in itself, a reason to reject or to ignore a poem. Especially in reading the poetry of the twentieth century, one often willingly assents to Allen Tate's statement that "poetry ... demands both in its writing and in its reading all the intellectual power that we have." Yet there is a distinction between the difficulty of obscurity and the difficulty of complexity. The latter emerges naturally from any attempt to capture a new feeling or a new idea. When Cleopatra tries to exculpate Antony from the charge of wantonness with the phrase, "his delights/ Were dolphin-like; they show'd his back above / The element they lived in," there is an extraordinary concentration of metaphor that is difficult to unravel. And there is a different sort of difficulty when Eliot writes "I will show you fear in a handful of dust": he is proposing a symbol whose logic is not immediately evident. But in both of these cases, the difficulty is in balance with a kind of perfect composure, a reserved simplicity: the poet has written exactly the right words, and the words form a natural and self-subsisting artifact. The reader's work is to figure out how to use that artifact, how to become accustomed to its contours; nothing more.

With Graham, however, the difficulty seems rather to be a case of the poet not having written the right words, or having left some of them out. The poem seems unfinished, because it dwells in the poet's mind, and not in the public realm where poet and reader discuss things in common:

go back
need more

100% NO LOAD

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having lived it leaves it possible

explain inseparable explain common

(the phone rings at dawn) (very occasionally)

One reads these lines with a sense not of interesting tension, but of slack juxtaposition.

Graham's lines certainly do not remain in the reader's memory as coherent wholes. Musically, her poems are defined by their erratic pace; they use line breaks, repetition, empty spaces, and punctuation to chop up semantic units. In this Graham is like most contemporary poets, for whom the choice of free verse is barely a choice. If anything, her verse, because it is more complex than the standard phrase-by-phrase lineation, is more interesting than most. Yet these techniques are never strong enough to impede the mind's stubborn tendency to read for meaning. Generally, one simply skips over Graham's breaks and puts the sentences and phrases back together.

FREE VERSE, ESPECIALLY the radically free verse that Graham uses, is often defended on the grounds that it is more faithful than formal verse to the rhythms of thought, to the vicissitudes of consciousness. And some such reason probably lies behind Graham's musical decisions, since the way it feels to think is itself one of the major subjects of her poetry:

needed explanation

because of the mystic nature of the theory

and our reliance on collective belief

Yet if we consider what really happens when we read these lines, it is clear that they sound merely like prose: "It needed explanation, because of the mystic nature of the theory and our reliance on collective belief." We register the point about the mind's rhythms only theoretically, after we remind ourselves that what the ear hears is not the same as what Graham has put on the page. When she does have a "sound effect," it is generally harsh and melodramatic, a row of heavy stresses: "Wind-hurryings. Low-lying of stoppages"; "the stout-fibered living wood." When the ear is not sensitive to a continuing pattern, from which subtle deviations can be made, it takes such loud noises to make it pay attention.

Why, after all this, should one go to the trouble of reading Graham? Her answer is to turn the question around on the reader, asking, in effect, "How can you admit that you are unable to read these poems?" To read her is to come across the poet in the midst of an evidently profound deliberation, whose grammar and concepts we must deduce; and if we cannot or will not do so, then we risk missing out on the profundity, and it is our loss. But surely there is no important idea, metaphysical or epistemological, that is immune to the forms of art. To imply otherwise, to suggest that there are thoughts or feelings that are too big or too deep to be made meaningful or beautiful, is really to misunderstand the nature of poetry. The poet's work does not end with the opacity of the mind, it begins with it. As long as Jorie Graham asks her readers to to fill in her blanks and solve for her x's, she has not realized, or even approached, poetry's greatest and truest possibilities. ■

Situationism

By CASS R. SUNSTEIN

The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Difference by Malcolm Gladwell

(Little, Brown & Co., 288 pp., $24.95)

IN 1957, THE sociologist Morton Grodzins introduced the idea of a "tipping point," in the context of a suggestion that once a certain percentage of minority group members enter a neighborhood (usually 20 percent, he proposed), the vast majority of whites will leave it. In the 1970s, the economist Thomas Schelling analyzed the "tipping point" phenomenon in considerable detail. In Schelling's account, in *Micromotives and Macrobehavior*, a tipping point is reached when a critical mass has formed, suddenly leading a large number of people to engage in behavior that they had formerly avoided. Like Grodzins, Schelling focussed on the phenomenon of racial segregation. When a few minority group members move into a neighborhood, Schelling observed, whites generally stay; but in some neighborhoods, many whites will leave once the percentage of African Americans goes above a certain point.

Schelling was writing three decades ago, and the dynamics of race relations in America are undoubtedly different today. Whites will typically have different "thresholds" for leaving; they will not agree about the precise percentage of minority group entrants that will lead them to leave. But what was important was not Schelling's example but his analysis, which can be applied far more broadly. What Schelling showed is that small individual decisions can produce an unintended social pattern of segregation, and that under certain assumptions a chain reaction will occur, as whites with the lowest thresholds leave early, then more minority group members move in, and then whites with low but somewhat higher thresholds leave, too. At a certain crucial stage—the tipping point—there is a dramatic increase in white flight.

The same concepts have been applied to many social phenomena, where dramatic shifts in behavior can be expected if and only if a critical mass is reached. "Tipping points" have been explored in connection with such varied activities as smoking, participating in political protests, voting for third-party candidates, going to college, striking, recycling, producing a revolution, using birth control, subscribing to magazines, rioting, even leaving bad dinner parties. Many people will strike, or smoke, or leave a bad party only after a certain number of people have already done so. But if and when a certain threshold is reached, the number of strikers, smokers, or delighted party-leavers can increase exponentially. Thus the notion of the tipping point—what used to be known as the straw that broke the camel's back—may cast light on many unanticipated and otherwise inexplicable large-scale social changes. The fall of communism, the rise of feminism, the attack on affirmative action, the power of the religious right, ethnic antagonism in Eastern Europe: all these have a great deal to do with tipping points.

A central lesson of the tipping-point literature is that small changes can make a large difference. The significant question is whether a critical mass can be reached, and little pushes and nudges may

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be sufficient to ensure that it is or is not reached. The tipping point is closely connected to the phenomenon of conformity: people tend to do what they think other people are doing. Thus teenage girls who see other teenagers having babies are more likely to become pregnant themselves; and those who know people who are on welfare are far more likely to go on welfare. If your neighbors recycle, you are much more likely to recycle. And so on. Whenever people observe other people doing something unanticipated or different, a process may be initiated in which social practices will eventually "tip."

MALCOLM GLADWELL SEEKS to unite a wide range of social phenomena under the idea of the tipping point. Drawing on Schelling and others, Gladwell contends that social practices are often quite fragile, and small shocks can produce dramatic change. This is true, he suggests, for fashions, television shows, sneakers, and restaurant choices, and also for crime, smoking, suicide, and much more. Consider, for example, the astonishing and unanticipated success of Hush Puppies, the old shoe company, which had an increase in annual sales from 30,000 to 1.8 million between 1994 and 1996. Gladwell thinks that Hush Puppies was the beneficiary of a "social epidemic," in which a few iconoclastic young people in the East Village in New York started a huge rebirth for the company. Or consider the sharp decrease in violent crime in New York City under Mayor Giuliani, with a 64.3 percent reduction in murders, and a nearly 50 percent drop in total crimes, in a five-year span. Gladwell sees this as an epidemic in action, unified with the Hush Puppies case by "contagious behavior," producing dramatic changes at a relatively discrete moment as a result of "little causes."

In Gladwell's account, social epidemics are governed by three rules. First, they are initiated by a small number of people. Second, what Gladwell calls "stickiness" is extremely important; an idea or a product sticks when and because it is memorable ("Winston tastes good like a cigarette should"). Gladwell urges that "there are specific ways of making a contagious message memorable; there are relatively simple changes in the presentation and structuring of information that can make a big difference in how much of an impact it makes." Third, context matters a great deal. We tend to think that people are what they are, and like what they like, and we attribute their behavior to their character, to their likes and to their dislikes. But Gladwell thinks that behavior is often a function less of character than of the particular setting; small changes in setting can produce large changes in people's actions. Much of Gladwell's discussion consists of an elaboration of what he calls the three rules of social epidemics: the Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor, and the Power of Context.

Gladwell divides the "few" who account for social epidemics into three categories: Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen. (Gladwell likes capital letters.) Connectors are people who know many other people and who link people to one another; they collect "people the same way others collect stamps." For the purpose of understanding social epidemics, it is important to recognize that connectors "manage to occupy many different worlds and subcultures and niches."

Connectors—Gladwell's primary example is an exceptionally social Dallas businessman named Roger Horchow—are well positioned to spread an idea or a product; they are the source of "word-of-mouth epidemics." Mavens, by contrast, are interested less in socialization than in the collection and the transmission of information. Gladwell believes that these "walking encyclopedias" are "important in starting epidemics," because they both know a great deal and seek to "pass it along," and thus operate as "sparks." Here Gladwell refers to Mark Alpert, who teaches at the University of Texas and who appears to be an expert on an astonishing range of products (hotels, cars, retirement plans, videos, and much more). But neither Connectors nor Mavens have the capacity to persuade; and this is where Salesmen become significant. Some people are especially convincing to others, often because of their optimism and confidence, which is frequently captured in subtle, nonverbal cues. These people can be extremely important in spreading an idea or a product.

To understand the Stickiness Factor, Gladwell turns to television, and more particularly to two popular shows for children, "Sesame Street" and "Blue's Clues." The producers of "Sesame Street" developed a set of strategies for holding children's attention. The trick was to ensure that children were not confused, for it is when children are confused that they stop watching. The producers used a great deal of pretesting to determine when children were actually attending to the screen and learning something from it. But "Blue's Clues," a show for pre-schoolers, is "even stickier."

"Blue's Clues," for those not in the know, is a show in which Blue, a cartoon dog, offers clues to the single live actor, Steve, about some puzzle, such as Blue's favorite story or favorite food. The viewer's task is to use the clues to guess the answer. As it happens, "Blue's Clues" has been a run-

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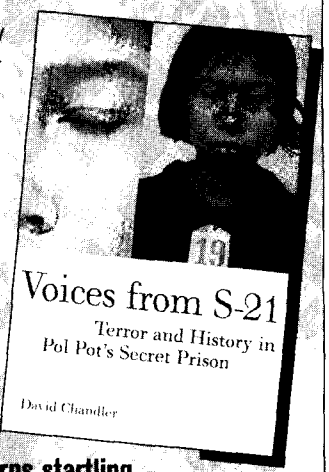

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away hit, trouncing "Sesame Street" itself within months of its debut in 1996. Gladwell claims that the reason is that "Blue's Clues" is extremely sticky. It lacks the cleverness and the wordplay of "Sesame Street"; it is less cluttered; it involves a great deal of repetition (children like repetition). Maybe most important of all, it is unified by a simple narrative with which it is easy to engage. According to Gladwell, the lesson is that there "are simple ways to package information that, under the right circumstances, can make it irresistible. All you have to do is find it."

By emphasizing the "Power of Context," Gladwell means to suggest that what people do is often a result of the setting, not of individual dispositions. Psychologists refer to the "fundamental attribution error" as the tendency to attribute behavior to people's innate characteristics rather than their situation. Gladwell offers a lot of evidence that the situation is important, not the person. Consider a chilling study by Philip Zimbardo and his colleagues at Stanford in the early 1970s. To learn something about why prisons are such nasty places, Zimbardo created a mock prison in the basement of Stanford's psychology building. Out of seventy-five applicants for the study, he chose the twenty-one who appeared most normal and healthy on psychological tests. Of the twenty-one, about half were selected, at random, to be guards in the mock prison; the other half were told that they would be prisoners. After six days the experiment had to be discontinued, simply because the students were taking their roles so seriously. The guards became increasingly abusive, even sadistic, while a number of the prisoners became hysterical, enraged, depressed. The study suggests that socially prescribed roles are often what is important, not individual character.

Many studies show that small changes in context can matter a great deal to behavior. John Darley and Daniel Batson at Princeton attempted to find some causes of good samaritanism, or helping behavior, through an experiment at the Princeton Theological Seminary. The students in the experiment were asked to walk over to a nearby building to give a brief speech; and along the way, each would run into a man slumped in an alley, coughing and groaning. To test what would make people help, Darley and Batson introduced three variables. First, they asked some students, and not others, to speak about why they chose to study theology. Second, they asked some students, and not others, to speak on the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan. Third, they told some students that they were running late, and others that they were a bit early. Contrary to expectations, the content of the speech made no difference to behavior. People asked to give either speech—including the one on the Bible's parable of the Good Samaritan!—were no more likely to help. What mattered a great deal, by contrast, was whether students were in a hurry. Of those who were told that they were in a hurry, only ten percent stopped to help; of those told that they were early, sixty percent stopped to help.

Gladwell thinks that such experiments, showing the large effects of apparently small changes in context, cast light on the decline in crime in New York City. He accepts the thesis, associated with James Q. Wilson, that "fixing broken windows"—combating small problems generally indicative of disorder and lawlessness—is largely responsible for the dramatic decline of violent crime there. The basic idea is that both law-abiding citizens and potential law-breakers take their cues from order or disorder. People who obey the law are less likely to use the streets in the presence of disorder, and prospective criminals are more likely to engage in criminal activity, taking disorder as a signal of what is possible. But if minor problems—such as panhandling, graffiti, prostitution, loitering, littering, and broken windows—are sharply reduced, the signals will be very different, and more serious crimes will decline, too.

In this view, crime is contagious, and efforts to stop or reverse a crime epidemic at the very start, through seemingly small changes in context, can have large beneficial consequences. For Gladwell, the tipping point, with respect to crime, is connected with "something physical like graffiti." The lesson of New York's successful attack on crime is that "an epidemic can be reversed, can be tipped, by tinkering with the smallest details of the immediate environment."

GLADWELL APPLIES THESE general ideas to two case studies, one involving a terrifically successful sneaker company, the other involving smoking. The sneaker company is Airwalk, which exploded in the early 1990s. It went from sales of $16 million in 1993 to sales of $175 million in 1996. The reason was an advertising campaign aimed at young people, based on a careful analysis of the emerging styles in various neighborhoods. Gladwell apparently thinks that Airwalk's success worked not merely through advertising, which is obvious enough, but through a form of contagion. With respect to smoking, Gladwell wants to know whether it might be possible to create a kind of nonsmoking epidemic by "tipping" social practices in a new direction.

Despite all the information about health risks, teenage smoking actually increased between 1993 and 1997. Since 1988, the number of teen smokers in America has jumped by no less than seventy-three percent. What might be done? Gladwell notes, by way of analogy, that highly publicized suicides often lead to more suicides, especially among young people, because the publicity makes suicide seem thinkable, not unusual, even cool. In the same vein, teenage smoking is contagious, above all because of the social meaning of smoking, which, for many adolescents, connotes a kind of sophistication and rebelliousness to which many young people are drawn.

What makes this troublesome is that smoking is addictive: it is not only contagious, it is also "sticky." Gladwell thinks that reductions in smoking are unlikely to come from government efforts to make it seem less cool. He thinks that this is a doomed project, since any efforts will tend to backfire. He favors instead attempts to combat nicotine addiction by requiring tobacco companies to lower current levels of nicotine so that even heavy smokers would get a substantially reduced level. Gladwell also argues that that there is an association between cigarette addiction and depression. Hence efforts to combat the latter, through drug therapy, may well reduce the former.

Gladwell concludes with considerable optimism about the possibility of self-conscious public management of social change. Our practices are far more malleable than they appear. They are not only malleable, they are also subject to sensible control: "we can shape the course of social epidemics." Thus an understanding of tipping points shows "the potential for change and the power of intelligent action."

GLADWELL IS AN engaging writer, with a fine eye for detail, memorable stories, and diverting facts about human psychology. With respect to "stickiness," he takes to heart his own advice about the vivid packaging of information. (He appears to have learned something from "Blue's Clues.") But he also ventures over an extremely wide territory, with phenomena that have important differences, and not everything hangs together. In particular, Gladwell does not sort out the relationships among the three supposed "rules" of the tipping point—the Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor, and the Power of Context.

In identifying them as "rules," I am not even sure what he is intending to claim. As the segregation example suggests, a tipping point depends on the achievement of a critical mass, and this

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may be reached without any particular "stickiness," and without changes in context of the sort that Gladwell describes. Gladwell's three supposed rules are better viewed not as rules at all, but as relevant factors in some social epidemics, though hardly in all of them. Once they are seen in this light, Gladwell seems to have less an argument, or a single phenomenon, than a collection of interesting but quite distinct narratives about popular programs and activities.

Consider a few examples. "Blue's Clues" has been a real success, and many children really do like it, partly because it contains vivid characters and a mystery, and partly because it is easy to follow. But Gladwell does not show how the techniques used for pre-schoolers bear on epidemics among adults; and in any case it is not clear how the "Law of the Few" played a role in the success of that particular television show. Gladwell does not identify the relevant Connectors, Mavens, or Salesmen. He does not even show how the tipping point idea applies to the program.

Nor does Gladwell spell out how, if at all, the Stickiness Factor helped to produce the decline in crime in New York. In fact, it is not clear that "fixing broken windows" and related police activity are the major reason for that decline; this is a greatly disputed question among specialists, with much uncertain evidence not reviewed by Gladwell. Critics suggest that changing demographics, increased police, changes in drug use, and computerized tracking systems help to explain New York's success. But even if "fixing broken windows" played a large role, the reason is that government created important new signals to both law-abiding citizens and prospective law-breakers, encouraging the former and discouraging the latter. At some point New York may have reached a tipping point, and seemingly small policies, such as fixing broken windows, may have played a significant part; but Gladwell's account is far too sketchy to demonstrate how or even whether this happened.

Many large-scale social changes do depend on the acts of a few entrepreneurs of one kind or another. Some of them are very good at selling, some of them know a lot of people. But in pointing to Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen, it is not clear what Gladwell means to do. Is he claiming, quite implausibly, that all three of these stylized creatures necessarily play a role in every social epidemic? Or is he claiming, trivially, that some of them sometimes do? While Gladwell tells some vivid tales, what he shows is simple, far from law-like, and not so surprising: that social changes are often fueled by people who know many other people; that we all benefit from those who spread specialized information; and that especially persuasive people can help produce large-scale shifts, simply because they are especially persuasive.

Nor does Gladwell explain when social practices are subject to tipping and when they are not. Sometimes he writes as if society were quite plastic—as if tipping were always possible, as if any idea, practice, or product could be spread if only Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen get behind them. But this is implausible. Communism and Fascism never had much success in the United States, though McCarthyism had a good short run; the Edsel never caught on with consumers, despite an extensive advertising campaign; consumers firmly rejected the New Coke. In Gladwell's own account, there might seem to be some real puzzles here. Communism, for example, is sticky ("workers of the world unite"; "from each according to ability, to each according to need"), it was popularized by a few (including Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen), and it faced some apparently hospitable contexts (the early 1930s, the 1960s). Why didn't it catch on?

We can make some progress on the question by understanding two important mechanisms behind large-scale social movements. The first mechanism involves information. The second mechanism involves reputation. Gladwell neglects both of these. He writes as if some ideas and products were literally contagious, when the idea of contagion is only a metaphor, and a misleading one, too.

Begin with information. If your friends are going to a certain restaurant, or supporting a particular candidate, or smoking cigarettes, or eating fruits to reduce the risk of cancer, then their actions provide signals about what it makes sense to do. If most people you know are following a certain course, you may want to do the same—not because you are a conformist, but because so many people are unlikely to be wrong.

This point suggests that social epidemics should be understood not as a matter of contagion, but as snowball effects or cascades. When an "informational cascade" (explored by, among others the economists Ivo Welch and David Hirshleiger, and the political scientist Suzanne Lohmann) occurs, a small group of people engage in certain behavior; and others do the same thing, simply because the small group is doing so; and still more join, simply because the group engaged in the relevant behavior is no longer so small; and before long large numbers eventually join, simply because a growing number of people seem to think that what is being

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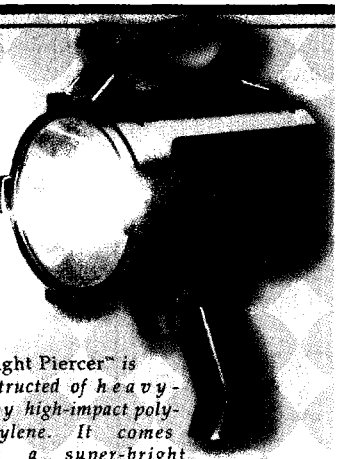

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done is good or right or fun to do.

Such an explanation emphasizes the information provided by the acts of others, and so it suggests that social epidemics are far less probable when most people are confident in the relevant beliefs, and hence unlikely to be impressed by the informational signals sent by others. There is not going to be a social cascade on behalf of communism, or a return to typewriters, simply because the vast majority of people have enough information to reject the signals provided by those who say that communism is good, or who think that typewriters are much better than word processors.

Turn now to the very different matter of reputation. When a number of people engage in a certain behavior, you might follow them to improve or even to preserve your reputation. Sometimes we do the same thing that others do not because others are likely to be right, but because others are likely to think better of us if we follow the same path, or less of us if we do not. Here, too, it is possible to imagine cascades and snowball effects (a point well discussed by Timur Kuran in *Private Truths, Public Lies*). A precondition for this sort of process is that many people's choices, in the relevant domain, must depend in large part on a desire to maintain or to improve their reputation. Sometimes this is true: consider clothing choices, where epidemics are pervasive. But often reputation is quite unimportant in people's decisions. When children watch "Blue's Clues," it is not because they care about their reputations; it is because they like the show. Many people choose recreational and political activities for reasons that have little to do with what other people think of them. In such circumstances, peer pressure is not an important variable.

THESE POINTS HELP sort out several puzzles that are obscured in Gladwell's extremely anecdotal account. When private views are firm, and when people are confident that they have sufficient information, they are far less likely to be vulnerable to the signals sent by other people. When the reputational effects of one or another course are not an important determinant of choices, peer pressure is neither here nor there. Many of Gladwell's examples can be better understood in these terms. Teenagers generally care a great deal about their reputations with their peers, and so we are likely to observe what appears to be "contagion" with respect to their choice of sneakers, fashion generally, smoking, even crime. And in many areas where things can be made to "tip," it is because people lack much private information, and small changes give some important signals about what it makes sense to do. Where people have enough information, and when they are not likely to do something merely because of a concern for reputation, a social cascade is not going to get off the ground.

An understanding of these matters could help in designing strategies for moving social practices in a better direction. Many college campuses, for example, face a problem of "binge drinking" among students, and administrators have struggled to find an approach that will actually reduce the problem. One of the few successful policies is astonishingly simple: inform students of the actual number of students who are binge drinkers. The actual number tends to be a lot lower than most students think; and once informed of the low number, students become far more reluctant to engage in binge drinking, and the problem is much reduced. Nor is this an isolated example. States have found that a successful strategy for increasing tax compliance is simply to inform people of the currently high level of the voluntary compliance. The lesson here is that most people do not like to be either dupes or freeloaders, and large behavioral changes can be produced simply by providing new information about what most people are doing. Once a critical mass is reached, things can indeed "tip."

Gladwell does not explore the many interesting ethical and political issues raised by the phenomenon of "tipping." There are significant differences, after all, between the growing popularity of a brand of sneakers and people's increasing willingness to refrain from violent crime. Everything in the world should not be seen as a commodity that one or another person is trying to "sell." It is also possible to raise questions about the idea that government should feel free to shape the course of social epidemics. Gladwell does not discuss the considerable potential for abuse here. But similar social dynamics may be at work in apparently unrelated areas, and alert policy-makers and propagandists, private or public, do have real opportunities to channel conduct in preferred directions, even to initiate cascades. Gladwell has not provided an adequate account of social epidemics, but he is correct to suggest that our practices are sometimes far more tractable than they seem. What we do and what we think is fascinatingly dependent, much of the time, on what we believe that other people do and think. ■

Killing Gestures

By EUGEN WEBER

Explosive Acts: Toulouse-Lautrec, Oscar Wilde, Félix Fénéon and the Art and Anarchy of the Fin de Siècle by David Sweetman

(Simon and Schuster, 512 pp., $35)

> To be governed is to be watched over, inspected, spied on, directed, legislated, regulated, docketed, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, assessed, weighed, censored, ordered about . . . noted, registered, taxed, stamped, measured, valued, patented, licensed, authorized, endorsed, admonished, hampered, reformed, rebuked, arrested. It is to be (on pretext of the general interest) drilled, held to ransom, exploited, monopolized, extorted, hoaxed, squeezed, robbed; then at the least resistance, at the first word of complaint, repressed, fined, abused, annoyed, followed, bullied, beaten, disarmed, garrotted, imprisoned, machine-gunned, judged, condemned, deported, flayed, sold, betrayed, and finally mocked, ridiculed, insulted, dishonored. That's government, that's its justice, that's its morality!

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THAT IS P.J. PROUDHON, the father of French anarchism. There may be many who feel that his excoriations still hold water. There certainly were those in *fin-de-siècle* France who found

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them inspiring, and hoped to send government packing along with its unrepresentative representatives, uncivil civil servants, unprofitable profiteers, their enforcers and lackeys and lickspittles.

This is the crux of David Sweetman's remit: the vogue of anarchism at the end of the nineteenth century, and the relations between its political doctrines and certain artists (Toulouse-Lautrec), writers (Oscar Wilde, Alfred Jarry), critics (Félix Fénéon). Sweetman believes that all subversion was of a piece. It is an appetizing argument; but it is an argument, alas, that Sweetman's book does not prove.

Anarchism is about morality. It asserts that existing society is based on immorality, injustice, and exploitation, and only society's abolition by any and every means will open the way to the good life. Men are born free, yet everywhere they are in chains. They are good and altruistic, yet socially conditioned to lead evil lives. Religious, political, or economic, their fetters are imposed by ruthless and often mindless authorities. "One thing all Anarchists have in common," declared Sébastien Faure, an authoritative *fin-de-siècle* anarchist: "they reject Authority in social organization and hate all restrictions proceeding from institutions based on the Authority principle." Anarchy, as its emblematic figure, Ravachol, told the judges trying him for murder, robbery, and bombings in 1892, would found one vast family, where none would know an enemy and all would be brothers.

The higher the objective, the more it justifies the means used to attain it. The road to the New Jerusalem would be fearsome. And Jerusalem once attained, fraternity might spill into ferocity, solidarity into suppression, as it did after 1789. Men should be forced to be free. Why not? Past hopes had crashed or soured. Political activism had proved unable to defeat or to amend corruption. One revolution after another had been crushed or assimilated; one promise after another had been broken. Pleas, platforms, votes had all proved useless; ideals had shrunk into incantations. The only hope left lay in direct action. And so, in pursuit of this heady vision, criminal idealists set to blow up the world in order to save it. Bombings, shootings, stabbings followed; as did robberies that expropriated expropriators to subsidize subversive acts. High-profile terrorism would destabilize criminal society. At the height of the terrorist epidemic of 1892–1894, most newspapers featured a column entitled "Dynamite."

For Emile Zola, though, the anarchists were poets, dreamers of dreams. Zola was not alone. Scandals had discredited the young Republic, depression gnawed at its economy, ideological and religious conflicts contaminated society and politics. The discovery of Russian novels in the 1880s introduced what some described as a religion of human suffering, and made the destruction of the present order seem more urgent. The organized violence of the state called for counterviolence: havoc bound to usher in a new dawn. No wonder that, as Sweetman rightly argues, the blustery rhetoric of social revolution and of anarchism attracted attention and sympathy.

Sweetman is right. What he fails to do, however, is to discriminate between anarchy and other contemporary orientations. Of the many characters that crowd his vivacious book, only the fastidious editor

COURTESY SIMON AND SCHUSTER

Toulouse-Lautrec on the beach, c. 1900

Félix Fénéon, who placed an incisive style in the service of avant-garde interests on every front, married rhetoric and action, art and politics. Closely associated with Symbolism, and with the Neo-Impressionism whose theoretical and formal basis he defined in 1886, Fénéon was probably the most important art critic of the late nineteenth century. While conscientiously clerking at the War Office, he used his discerning eye to appreciate literary and visual subversion even as he contributed to the carnage he supported. But associates and friends also lined up by Sweetman kicked over the traces in order to serve not humanity but beauty (Lautrec, Wilde) or misanthropy (Jarry). That their activities coincided with contemporary refractoriness did not make them anarchists, or even fellow travelers of anarchy. Coincidence is not congruence.

Sweetman pays little heed to the fact that the social revolt of the anarchists was paralleled by the social disenchantment of the more sensitive scions of the upper classes. The young especially were in a sulky mood: nauseated by their decadent selves and their surroundings, affronted by the vulgarity of democracy and modernity lapping at their lives, their susceptibilities jarred by the spectacle of corruption at one level and destitution at another. Bourgeois society and politics revolted them. Dilettantes (these were the years when the Italian term entered the French language) and decadents, they flirted with transgression, mysticism, occultism, satanism, homosexuality, and drugs; and they took minor delinquencies for granted. Anarchist exploits could contribute new highs to their sensations and counteract world-weariness and ennui. "*C'est beau un beau crime*!" asserted one journalist: a fine crime was fine. Human lives counted less than vibrant experiences, especially vicarious ones.

Living, which was altogether too demanding, was best left to the servants, as in Villiers de l'Isle Adam's *Axel* (1886), in which the hero and the heroine commit suicide to avoid being sullied by life. But one could not expect such stylish exits too often. As Bernard Shaw complained to his French translator in 1889, the French had had the highest tower in the world open to the public for weeks, yet none had used it to commit suicide. Shaw forgot that, just two years before, perhaps inspired by *Axel*, a young writer called Chambige had concluded a suicide pact with his mistress, shot her dead, but lacked the courage to follow up. In his twinkie defense he adduced the disastrous effect of amoral decadent reading, and the guillotine finished what the hesitant romantic had bungled. For a while, *chambigisme* affected dilettantes in search of strong emotions, such as the effete millionaire's son in Zola's novel *Paris* (1898), who succumbs to the seductions of sedition and affects revolutionary sympathies to cure his spleen.

Maurice Barrès, an upper-class egotist who committed a trilogy entitled *Le Culte du Moi* (1888–1891), wrote an apology for Chambige, and the ardent quest for new emotions, and the pursuit of vivid thrills, and the wasted heroism of lonely elite souls. His slender volumes challenged authority, conformism, and those masqueraders "who wandered around clad in feelings that were never theirs." They rang a clarion call for individual authenticity and individual sensibility. One might say of Barrès what Barrès said of Tiepolo: that he tried to turn instinctive sensibilities into reflective ones. And one might say the

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same about Toulouse-Lautrec, though Sweetman never does. Both were irreducible individualists, superior dilettantes who worked their way to truth not through the head but through the heart: no impersonal *cogito* for them, only a highly personal *sentio*.

For the Barrès of those days—the one who inspired Léon Blum and André Malraux, and whom the Surrealists tried for "treason" because he had changed his mind—all people beyond his self were counted as "barbarians," as oppressive and repulsive Others. When the young aesthete moved from self-assertion to national dogmatism, and tried to cure the French of flabby listlessness, his admirers persisted in self-indulgence. On the right and on the left, social revolt complemented literary and sentimental revolt. Consistent reactionaries called for return to the seventeenth century or, better still, the first. On the opposite side, those who cried "Long live Anarchy!" often added "Long live Free Verse!" And Laurent Tailhade, the poet who would lose an eye to an anarchist bomb, invoked the "Goddess with radiant eyes":

> Anarchy! oh torchbearer
> Dispel the night! crush the
> vermin!

Vermin were legion, and crushing them seemed more exciting than dispelling the night. Tailhade's dark religion of regeneration by terror was also that of Ravachol, the murderer and the grave-robber. And of Emile Henry who, in 1894, blew up a railway station café full of clerks, employees, and shop assistants. Their like, Tailhade had said, before he was maimed by the bomb that Fénéon planted, "have the insignificance, the selfishness, the atrophied intelligence, the callousness of decent folk." Accomplices of the bourgeoisie, these soulless midgets deserved no more mercy than their exploiters did. Anyway, "what do vague victims matter, if the gesture's fine!"

Henry, an angry young man who mistook rancor for energy and liked to quote Stendhal, endorsed these sentiments. The anarchy of most aesthetes was a spiteful nihilism like his. Still, it replaced bombs and daggers with imprecations and pranks, such as the large stone phallus on Jarry's mantelpiece, crowned by a bishop's skullcap. Obscenity and sacrilege shocked the philistines, and suited the anti-clerical climate of the era, when Church and State were at loggerheads.

Blasphemy, iconoclasm, and aggressive incoherence were Jarry's forte. His life was one brief but intense protest against crude philistinism, turpitudinous bourgeois, and silly authorities; against ninnies everywhere. The echo that his repulsions found in his generation accounted for the impact that his play *Ubu Roi* made in 1896. Ubu, who invents a widely hailed brain-gutting machine, is a gross monster moved not by honor, virtue, courage, pity, reason, or even by self-interest, but solely by conceit, cowardice, and greed. His creator, who dyed his hair green, was the spiritual ancestor of André Breton, for whom beauty had to be convulsive or not be at all, and the ultimate surrealist act would be to shoot haphazardly at the crowd of cretins in the street. Their anarchism is above all rebellion against the indifference and anonymity of our modern world. No wonder that King Ubu's sceptre is a lavatory brush; and that the young William Butler Yeats concluded, after seeing the play: "After us, the savage God."

But again, the distinction between art and politics must be observed. Jarry's social criticism was not meant to improve the lot of society's victims. His militant nihilism had nothing in common with the values represented by Bakunin, or Kropotkin, or the worker apostles of *fin-de-siècle* anarchism, all of whom would have rejected his absurdist views. It predicted instead, as the Surrealists and the existentialists would witness, the intellectual predicaments and ventures that left their mark on the twentieth century. Oscar Wilde, moreover, was not the prophet of a savage God. Published in 1891, *The Soul of Man under Socialism* was a plea for individualism and artistic freedom as aspects of freedom for all, even those less cultivated and witty than its author. It also translated Paul Lafargue's recent *Droit à la paresse* (a call for leisure for overworked working men) into a plea for creative idleness for the unvirtuous poor. Wilde's socialism was a shadow of sophistication that called more for refinement than for reform. His utopias were building blocks of progress toward a more elegant world, in which all "could realize some form of beautiful and intellectual life." Banal perhaps, but hopeful.

Sweetman attributes rebellion and disobedience to Wilde, but in his thinking they were simply adjuncts of progress and artistic freedom, not steps to pulling society down around one's ears. Jarry called for "blind and constant indiscipline." But Wilde was interested only in irreverence. What would be left to mock, if society with its bores and rituals were abolished? His sunnier subversion echoed rather Whitman's "resist much, obey little." Reason would prevail; bloodshed could be avoided. No one, as in Ubu's apocalypses, need be cast into some bottomless pit.

For Sweetman, Wilde's sexual frolics were liberating acts. This both magnifies and denatures them. Why not just stealthy (and not so stealthy) pleasures? Of course Wilde changed after 1895, after trial and jail; but the individualism that he flaunted was primarily about art. He was flamboyant without sulphur, saucy without surliness, brilliant without bile. When he declared himself a socialist, and "something

Election Day

Though decked out in the Stars and Stripes,
the polling place was still a funeral home;
but then, ours was a neighborhood of funeral homes,
the way that some neighborhoods are known
for their streets of shoe stores or butcher shops.
On election day, the usually phantasmal aldermen
would be out with their cronies, shaking hands,
dressed in black cashmere overcoats like proper
mourners. The air smelled of cigars, and bars
that opened early, and incense from the church
whose doors also stood open as if at any moment
a coffin might come barging into traffic.
A funeral procession of dark Caddies
lined the tow zones. It was one of those dizzying
days of contradictory weather: Indian Summer
on one side of the street, December on the other,
especially when wind leaned into the shadows
that gathered as if the dead were lurking—lost
souls, spirits wandering like drunks
wondering where they'd parked their cars, ghosts—
most of them still voting.

Stuart Dybek

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of an Anarchist," he sacrificed more to radical chic than to apocalyptic ire.

But least convincing as a fellow traveler of anarchist revolution is the central figure of Sweetman's book, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec: a rebel certainly, but against certain ways of painting, not of governing. The son of a nutty nobleman, Lautrec inherited his father's passion for posturing, for unconventional behavior, and for sketching. His painterly style, hasty, unfinished, vivid, his great flat blocks of color, breathed a new pungency—especially into poster art, which was designed to grab the eye. One associates Lautrec with images of amusing depravity, playful prancing, spicy shindigs. Yet Sweetman perceives correctly that his vibrant colors mask an underlying astringency, and the sense of joylessness, loneliness, and ennui that many contemporaries shared. His bleak vision of the poor made Fénéon hail Toulouse-Lautrec's work as "art of the people for the people." It was nothing of the sort.

Sweetman is informative and entertaining about many aspects of Lautrec's life, but finally he gets the man wrong—as he also gets Aristide Bruant askew, for whom Lautrec painted some of his most vigorous works. The acrid "realist" and "naturalist" ditties that Bruant delivered in his Montmartre cabaret, *Le Chat Noir*, voiced a populist vision that mixed sentiment, banter, bitterness, and derision, sympathy for the poor, scorn for money-grubbers, and aversion for Jews and foreigners. Sweetman is intrigued by Bruant's "tenacious patriotic streak strangely at odds with his revolutionary sentiments," but he does not seem to know that the Paris Commune of 1871 was sparked as much by patriotic humiliation as by social hurt. Nor does he mention Bruant's venomous anti-Semitism.

Lautrec's indifferent acceptance of the anti-Semitic attitudes that were commonplace in his day makes Sweetman uncomfortable, as does the artist's production of "material clearly open to dangerous misinterpretation." But the misinterpretation is in Sweetman's court. Jews have been regarded as symbolic capitalists since the days of Judas. In this sense, anti-Jewish sentiment was unexceptional, and it was particularly ardent on the left until the Dreyfus affair made it politically incorrect. Like other leftists and rightists of his day (the caustic caricaturist Jean-Louis Forain provides a case in point), Bruant was an anarchist *and* a reactionary, a chauvinist *and* a rebel. Lautrec would be more interested in the graphic value of his images than in their implications.

Sweetman wants to squeeze Lautrec, like his other victims, into the corset of political engagement, and blames him when his treatment of a subject "deflects attention from political substance." He should pay more attention to Joan Halperin, whose book on Félix Fénéon he credits and uses lavishly: "Lautrec himself professed no interest in anarchism or in any sort of politics, but his nonconformist character and art endeared him to the *libertaires*." They endear him to Sweetman, too. For Lautrec, however, his art was the only serious issue. For the rest, as Halperin testifies, "his deformity made him an outsider, and he had acquired a healthy distrust of most of his fellow men...." On other fronts he was an "incoherent"; and his participation in the prankish, parodic, and anti-pompous movement of Incoherent Arts when he was an art student in the 1880s sheds more light on his orientation than any imagined political affinities.

One regrets that an amusing book, rich in anecdote and description, is marred by carelessness and misinformation. René Bérenger was not Béranger, as Sweetman calls him. Georges Clemenceau was not a Socialist. Baudelaire did not view dandies as "essentially democratic"—quite the contrary. Mazas prison, situated on a boulevard named after a colonel who died at Austerlitz, was never referred to as La Mazas. Radicals and intellectuals did not, after their *fin-de-siècle* flirtation, move from anarchism "toward the rising Communist Party," which could not have begun to rise until its establishment in 1920. And so on.

But Sweetman's account is impaired most of all by its argument, which, paying slight heed to what really went on, never makes its case for a single ideological agenda that was shared by all its extraordinary cast of characters. And Lautrec, who holds center stage, illustrates my point. It is interesting to learn that he helped paint the sets for Jarry's *Ubu* (perhaps, as we are not told, because the two men shared a passion for bicycles); but he also painted panels for La Goulue's fun-fair tent, when the sexy dancer had become fat and scruffy. Like *fin-de-siècle* beer, Lautrec's heart was both warm and bitter. Since reality rested on the surface, he looked hard but read little, and left his mind uncluttered by intellectual ballast.

Sweetman quotes Lautrec's crack that avant-garde theater consisted of actors performing with their backs to the audience, but he pays no heed to its dismissive implications. Like his syphilis, like his alcoholism, the man's relations were personal, not political; and so were his sympathies. The subtext of his creations was the ribald cheerlessness of a generation in which *omne animal* seemed *triste* for no particular reason. If vice is sinning without pleasure, as Colette said, then this was a vicious age. ■

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MERCA DIARIST

Court Martial

OVER THE PAST DECADE Somalia has earned a reputation as the world capital of senseless violence. It scores almost as high in the poverty department. The coastal city of Merca, then, is that strangest of phenomena—a Somali boomtown. Merca's marketplace is loaded with everything from mangos to jewelry to stereos. The town boasts two computer schools, a cellular phone network, and, coming soon, an Internet service provider. For the first time in years, people can travel to Mogadishu, 65 miles away, without fear of being robbed or killed at any of the dozens of checkpoints that used to dot the road.

THE MAN RESPONSIBLE FOR MUCH OF this is Sheik Hassan Ainte, a top leader of Mogadishu's Islamic Courts. The Courts have existed for many years but didn't possess a well-organized militia to enforce their edicts until last year. That's when businessmen in south Mogadishu got fed up with their feckless warlord, Hussein Aideed, who inherited the job when his father, Mohamed Farah Aideed, was killed. Hoping to establish a semblance of order, the businessmen bankrolled a new militia run by local clerics, including Ainte.

AINTE SOON PUSHED THE MILITIA'S influence beyond Mogadishu. In a matter of months it seized Merca and the strategic road that links it to Mogadishu. Now the Islamic Courts (as everyone refers to the militia) are pushing even further south, deep into Somalia's fertile Lower Shabelle region. The group eventually hopes to sweep through the country, much as the Taliban did in Afghanistan, and unify it under Islam. And, for better or for worse, it just might.

FOR U.S. POLICYMAKERS WORRIED about Islamic fundamentalism, an African Taliban is not an ideal solution to Somalia's troubles. But even they must admit how serious these troubles are. Since the failed U.N. intervention in the early '90s, the country's northern regions, known as Somaliland and Puntland, have achieved a surprising measure of stability. But southern Somalia is still plagued by v-chip levels of violence and anarchy. Kidnapping is a serious problem. Americans who visit Mogadishu tend to stay for only a few days and usually surround themselves with a jeepload of Kalashnikov-toting bodyguards. Merca is far safer, but even there I was flanked by several no-nonsense youths who possessed Columbine levels of personal firepower.

AND FOR GOOD REASON. ONE DAY, AS my Landcruiser bounced across the sand dunes outside town, the three guards with me spotted an Islamic Courts pickup truck with an anti-aircraft gun in its flatbed approaching from the opposite direction. With a flick of his thumb, the guard sitting next to me undid the safety catch on his AK-47. We waited tensely. The pickup passed us without incident.

IF ANYONE CAN MAKE SUCH EVENTS A thing of the past, it is Ainte, whom I tracked down at his headquarters in Merca's Hotel Fatxi. The entrance is usually guarded by several dozen Islamic militiamen draped in bandoliers and leaning against a bullet-pocked truck. The hotel, a star or two below seedy, reflects the no-frills seriousness of the sheik.

WHEN I VISITED A MONTH AGO, A half-dozen men were crammed into an ill-lit room, some wearing sarongs, others in vaguely militaristic outfits. Most had the sort of hard stare you see from Mike Tyson just before the first bell. A cell phone rang, prompting several of the men to reach into their pockets to check their Nokias. But the ringing came from the sheik's phone, and, after checking the incoming number—the sheik has Caller I.D.—he handed the phone to a bearded assistant.

ASKED HOW MANY FIGHTERS HE COMmands, Ainte was coy. He also preferred not to discuss the United States. But he was more forthcoming about the Taliban—whose lightning-quick ascension to power the Islamic Courts wish to emulate. "There are similarities and differences, but very big differences," Ainte said. "We are all Muslim. They came to power by shedding blood, but we don't want to do that. They killed a lot of people. We don't want that. We came here at the request of the people. Everyone is happy with us."

WELL, NOT QUITE EVERYONE. MERCA'S business community is indeed pleased with the open road to Mogadishu and the stability in town, but it is worried about what will come next. The militia has rounded up lawbreakers and handed out mild punishments, at least by the Taliban's limb-reducing standards. But nobody seems altogether confident that the Courts' current moderation will last. "There are two ways this can go," says Isse Haji Ismail, a leading businessman in Merca. "One way is evolution. We tell them how grateful we are that they have brought us security ... and that it is time for them to go home. The other way is that, at the same time, we get our own [armed] groups ready, and, if they will not leave when we ask them, we will fight them."

IF THE MILITIA'S LEADERS TRY TO turn it into a force capable of militarily and politically dominating the country, that fight will almost certainly occur—since the businessmen who fund the Courts think Islamic law, or *sharia*, is bad for business. But by that time the militia may be more powerful than the moneymen who gave birth to it. After all, although the sheik denies it, most observers assume that his militia gets money from abroad as well.

POWERFUL FACTIONS OPPOSE THE Islamic Courts, including the Rahanwein Resistance Army—based in central Somalia and backed by the Ethiopian army, which has fought inside Somalia off and on for some time and is no friend to fundamentalist movements. Also, it's unclear whether Islam is a unifier strong enough to overcome Somalia's legendary clan allegiances. Although Islamic law is often used to adjudicate disputes or criminal acts, Somalis also have a deep-seated tradition of meting out justice through gatherings of clan or village elders. They would balk at transferring all judicial power to the clerics. But Ainte is in no mood for compromise. "There will be nobody against Islamic Courts or *sharia*," he said, shaking his head vigorously. And he stood firm in his commitment to spread *sharia* to all Somalia: "We are not here for anything else."

AS IF TO UNDERSCORE THE POINT, ONE of the sheik's younger advisers sidled up to me as the interview drew to a close and asked whether I was interested in becoming a Muslim and joining the militia. After several seconds of horrified silence, I blurted out a reply I hoped would get me off the hook: "I think my mother would be very disappointed if I did that." They laughed, fortunately, and bade me farewell.

PETER MAASS

PETER MAASS is author of *Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War*, his memoir of the Balkan conflict.

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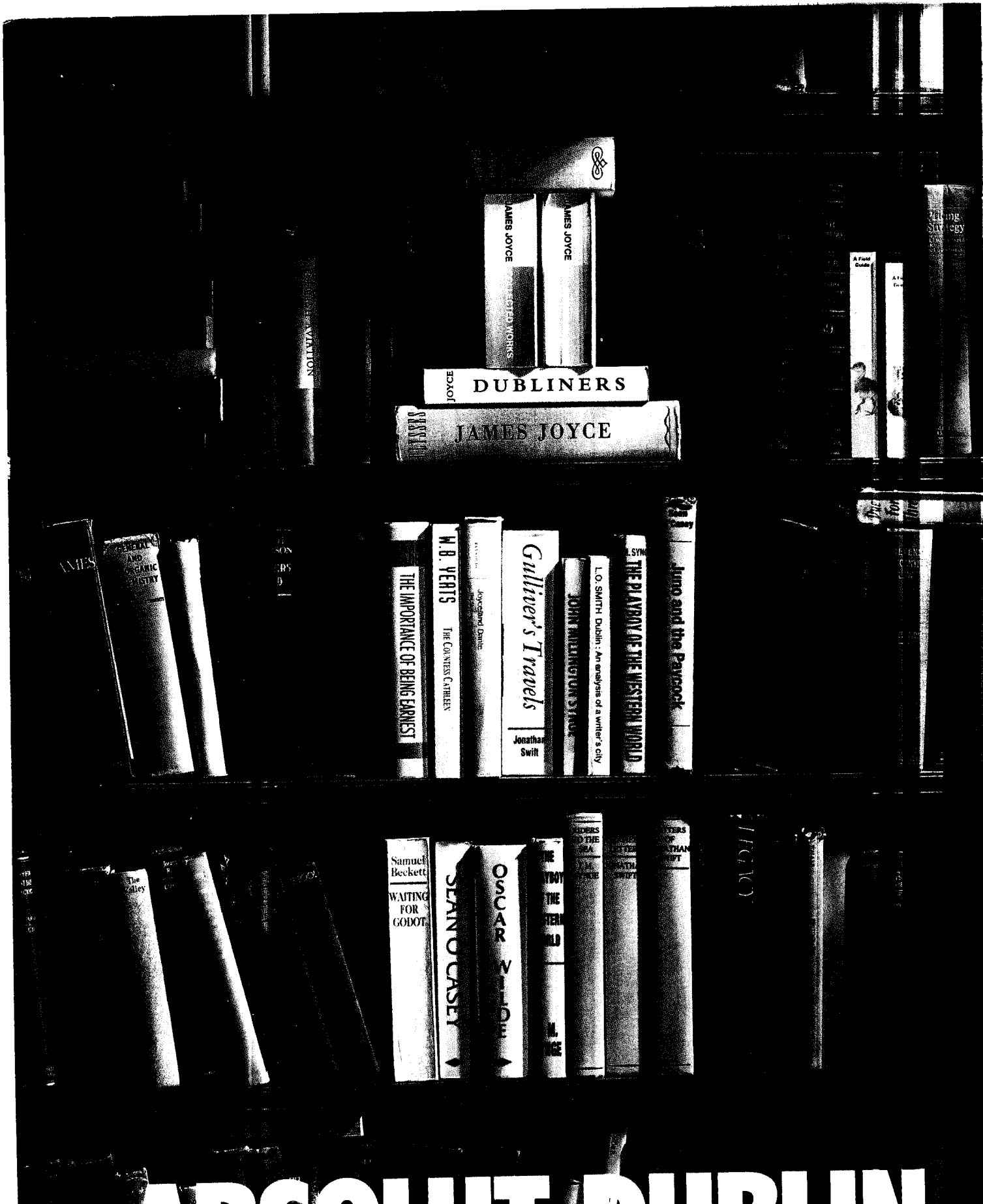

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